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VOL. II

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EDITORIAL

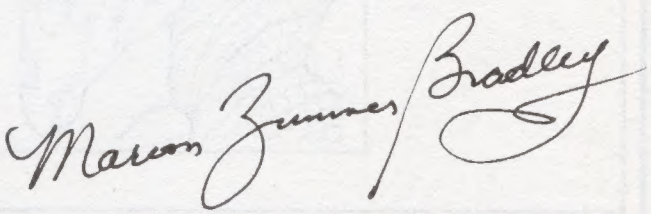
For the second time in my recollection, we have an issue coming out almost at Halloween. (The issue is a little bit late, due to various technical problems, for which we apologize.) Every now and then, though I tend to be a peaceful person, something on the TV makes me really crazy. This time it is a group of people here in California in the Palo Alto school district who have taken it upon themselves to forbid any celebration of Halloween at their school because, they say, Halloween is a pagan holiday and related to the worship of Satan!

Well, I am as opposed to the worship of Satan as any other Christian, but that isn't the issue here. The same sort of person who objects to school Halloween parties as a "pagan holiday" seems to have no objection to school Christmas parties. Are we now to take Halloween as a religious event but Christmas as a secular one? The last time I looked, the Constitution of the United States forbade the state establishment of any religion. It doesn't say "any religion but Christianity".

When I was young, there was no suggestion that dressing up in costumes and trick-or-treating led one down the slippery path to damnation. It was fun; that was all. It was a chance to exercise your creativity (or your mother's creativity), and no one can convince me that there is anything bad about joining in the act of creation with God.

I must admit, though, that my early upbringing was not conducive to learning religious tolerance, or to learning much at all about other religions. When I was a kid, I knew very little of Jewish observances; there were half a dozen or so Jewish children in my school and I knew of them only that, like the Catholics, they had religious holidays I didn't. So later, in college, I had some amusing experiences when people got mixed up and heard my name as Miriam Zimmerman. (For some reason or other, people find "Zimmerman" easier to deal with than "Zimmer".) One afternoon I was lunching in a local restaurant with one of my friends and ordered a liverwurst and cheese sandwich. Gloria stared at me in dismay and asked "Doesn't your family keep Kosher?" I had no idea what the word even meant and had to look it up in the encyclopedia!

A sequel to this was that my elderly maiden aunt asked rather worriedly, "You seem to have a lot of Catholic and Jewish friends; can't you find some nice Protestant girls to be friends with?" Well, I would hate to suggest that my late aunt was narrow-minded, but now that she has gone to her heavenly reward, I dare say that she's shocked to find the Heavenly choir featuring such wonderful musicians as Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson. But for myself, I'm looking forward to hearing them again some day.



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Bloodsong

by Jo Clayton

Yohn trotted on fox feet along the game trail following the scent and sound of a creek somewhere ahead. A while back she'd caught a squirrel and the taste of its rank meat lingered unpleasantly in her mouth.

The moon was long down, but the sky was clear and the star glitter was bright among the pointed pines. With dawn so close the dew had descended and the wind was beginning to pick up, setting pine needles to whispering around her.

In the distance an owl hooted and was answered by a howl. The hairs stirred along Yohn's spine. She lifted her muzzle, tasted the wind, but in the potpourri of odors there was no wolf.

She started on, walking with quick delicacy, her head up, ears pricked, nose continually testing the wind until the trees opened out and she saw the dark glimmer of the creek.

After looking cautiously about, testing the wind again, she trotted over, bent her neck and lapped at the cold clear water.

A man came silent as smoke from the trees and stood on the opposite bank staring at her.

Yohn felt his eyes on her, jerked her head up.

He was tall and thin, with black hair braided into a club that hung forward over his shoulder. His face was deeply lined, but he didn't look old; there was too much life and vigor in the way he held his body. He smiled at her, black eyes burning. "I see you," he said.

Yohn tried to take a step back, tried to turn and run.

She couldn't move.

She tried to shift shape and break free that way.

She was frozen in fox form.

"Come," he said, his voice dark music, blending with the rush of the water and the susurrus of the wind in the pines. "Come to me, were-child."

The word impelled her into the creek where the current seized hold of her and tried to pull her under or slam her against the boulders that churned the dark water white. In the back of her head something screamed at her to let go, to let the creek take her away from him, but the hold he had on her wouldn't let her heed it.

Her feet touched gravel, then she was leaping up the bank and running to him. Her nose at his knee, she stood shivering, head down, water streaming from her thick red fur.

The man bent down, touched her head, then he strolled into the shadow under the trees and started downhill along the creek bank. She shook herself furiously, sending a shower of droplets flying all round, then followed him, pulled along by a leash she could neither see nor break.

Half an hour's walk brought them to a cliff; the creek poured over it in a white arch of foam between heaps of huge boulders which looked as if they'd tumbled there when the world was young and men were only a glimmer in a god's eye.

The man touched a mossy slab and it rolled silently back. He snapped his fingers.

Her body bowed, tail tucked between her legs, her claws scrabbling at the gravel as she fought the compulsion, Yohn went reluctantly into the black hole behind the slab.

Arakney came yawning from the tent, stopped beside the embers of last night's fire and stood pulling apart the heavy night-braid, her thick gray hair springing into crinkled waves as she shook it free. "Yohn, you up? Mind fetching some wood?" She took a comb from her pocket and began working out the tangles that sleep had left behind.

Piri came shambling round the van, his wizened face comically grave above an armload of sticks. "Hasn't got back yet."

Arakney paused in her combing. "You sure?"

"I checked her pallet. Blankets are cold and it's still made up."

"F'lich! That girl!" She frowned. "It's not like her, Piri. Trouble? Hm." She thrust the comb in a pocket and hurried to the van, muttering to herself as she climbed inside. A moment later she was out with a round bronze mirror and the square of soft leather she used as a polish cloth. "Leave the fire for later, come help me take a look round."

* * *

Piri sat cross-legged on a tuffet of grass, the heavy silver flute held so lightly it seemed to float. The Osuni was a spidery figure no larger than a child, skin hard and smooth as a hand-burnished walnut shell, a strip of maroon fleece for hair running from ear to ear. He raised a woolly brow, began playing at Arakney's nod.

No sound came from the flute but the air around him wavered and eddied like heat waves without the heat.

Arakney breathed on the mirror, then polished it again with the leather. She cupped it between her hands and sang down into it; the surface of the mirror rippled under the force of the sound.

Images flickered across the bronze, glimpses that appeared and vanished in the same breath, bits of game trail, moon dappled glades, a flash of white on the tail of a squirrel — the mirror's eye flitting from place to place where Yohn had been, darting on when it became evident she was no longer there. The pattern replayed several times, then there was a flare of light like a visual scream — and a glimpse of *something* before the mirror once more reflected only Arakney's face.

She sighed, straightened her back, lifted a hand to stop Piri's playing. "No joy there," she said. "Did you catch anything of that last bit?"

He shook out the flute, rested it on his knee. "A chill, like the wind off a glacier?"

"Yes. We have business here." She grimaced, slipped the mirror into its cover. "And Yohn stuck her pointy fox nose into that business, I'm afraid."

Piri clicked his tongue, got to his feet. "At least she's alive. At least we know that." He whistled, a sweet warble that brought Dapple trotting to the van.

Arakney walked at Dapple's shoulder, going down around the mountainside, frowning at a road that grew gradually more maintained the lower she went. As she walked, she searched for that presence she'd felt so briefly in the mirror, but there was nothing of it anywhere she could reach.

Shortly after noon they stopped to water Dapple, give him a measure of grain and let him graze. Arakney tried the mirror again, but all it showed her was Yohn's fox face, ears angry, eyes narrowed to slits, mouth open in a snarl.

She slipped the mirror into its pouch. "We'll sleep under ward from now on till we find Yohn and finish this business."

"Hm. Folks down below won't be talking to outsiders."

"Not directly, but we might be able to chase down some local tales and find our target between the lines."

"Didn't work with the Ibalatt. Or the Ganda. Or the Henriads."

"Piri, what's wrong?"

He twisted his face into a lopsided scowl, scratched twiggy fingers through his fleece. "I can't *see* him, but I can feel the stink of his breath on me. It's a strong stink, K'ney. He's an old one."

Arakney sighed and got to her feet. "It's what we do, Piri. No one ever promised us it would be easy."

An hour later they were rattling north along a paved road built on the bank of a deep but narrow river, passing small neat fields with a number of people working in them, heading toward the sharp bend where the valley angled round a high upthrust of naked stone.

As soon as they turned that bend Arakney saw a large structure like a castle without a curtain wall, built on what looked like a hill with the top sliced off. Behind it, the valley ended abruptly in a cliff, five hundred feet of rotten rock rising straight up from the valley floor. The river rushed over it in a broad fall that cast up billows of rainbow-sprinkled mist improbably dramatic in its contrast to the dark brooding House.

A small village nestled at the base of that hill, tall narrow houses with dull brown walls and slate roofs; there were no trees and if there were any gardens or other attempts at color, they were well concealed behind walls.

On the riverbank, next to a high arched bridge and a boat landing, with a space between it and the village as if the village were drawing its skirts carefully clear, was a different sort of structure, low and rambling, built from axe-squared logs. Beside a massive, iron-bound door there was a holly bush whose bright red berries were shouts against the drabness of the place. The village Inn.

The Host sat in a worn leather chair, the cashbox at his elbow; he was carving a pattern in low relief into the wood of an ale mug. Several others sat on the bar at his elbow, blanks turned on a lathe from a pale wood that looked like seasoned oak. He kept on with his work for a moment after Arakney pushed the door open and came inside, then lifted his head and examined her with slow deliberation. "Yes?"

He was a short, broad man with a crest of ash brown hair and dark eyes sunk in nests of wrinkles. A crinkly, luxuriant mustache was trained into rat tails which curled round his mouth.

"I am the Story Spinner Arakney Ko'eem." She looked round the room — shadowy, only the one lamp lit. And empty. "How do people round here feel about sung story?"

"Depends if you're any good. Are you?"

"Yes."

"Say that's true, you could fetch a pretty good crowd. There's winter coin tucked away waiting for a reason to come out."

"What price your rooms?"

"Two coppers the night for one in a room; if there're two of you, it'll be three; you get breakfast with that, usually sausage and fry bread, maybe a bit of onion should m' sister be feeling free-like. She's cook and good too if it's me who says it. Other meals you pay for separate. We got a bathhouse, a copper for using that and another for the wood if you want the water hot. You want stabling, a copper a day for the roof, another for fodder, grain's extra."

"Hm. I'll need one room for me and my flute player, stabling and place to park the van." She looked round again, made it obvious that she was noting the lack of custom. "Say I pay for one night, five coppers, then I pull in enough folk to fill this place, say you remit the fees for the next several nights, long as I bring good crowds here."

"Hm. Say you do pack 'em in, I give you meals and grain free."

"Hm. Say rather, room and meals and bathhouse free, I pay for stabling and grain."

"Drop the five coppers on me and it's a deal."

He took them from her, stood bouncing them in his fist, listening to the clinks, then he pursed his lips, his mustache twitching with the movement. "One thing you need to know, Spinner. There's a rule in this valley. No music whether it be voice or instrument any later than one hour after sundown. Telling your stories without the music is fine, but if you get near to singing 'em, out you go because I'll not be

sharing the trouble you bring."

"Understood." She thought about pushing a bit and asking him why, but decided the timing was wrong. "Any rules about singing in the street? And what's the name of that village?"

"Best be in the square, that's where the players that come by Royap usually set up. The village is Kitso Royap. The valley's Ungaa-tai — the land of the Ungava. And the river, at least in these stretches, is the Guhvah."

He rocked on his heels, looking pleased with himself, his eyes reduced to gleams in their wrinkle webs. Arakney suppressed a grin. Obviously he considered himself the guide and educator for traders and any others who came to do business here. And, obviously, he got much gratification from the role.

"You must have seen the Great House by the Waterfall. That is the Waokiv. And who lives there is the Skawa and her daughter the Maskay. If it should be you have occasion to speak to that person, it is required that you say Utithi Skawa. If you do not, you will be beaten. You will not speak to the Maskay at any time. If that person asks a question, you will speak to the Skawa as if the question came from that mouth."

"Understood."

The village square was naked and ugly. The dull dun walls of the houses were rammed earth shaved clean of grass, the paving stones like the roof tiles were cut from slates the color of bruises.

Arakney wrinkled her nose. "Either they're starved for some color in their miserable lives," she muttered, "or they're going to hate us a lot. Shall we test it and see?"

Piri flipped open his rug and dropped to sit cross-legged on the swirling dark reds, greens and purples of the elaborate design. He took a few preparatory breaths, shook his hands loose, then stripped the flute of its cover and began playing a step-dancing tune with a strong, seductive beat.

Arakney swayed to the music, took out the Spinner's Gourds.

Shsh shsh, the gourds went, hail on a roof, grain on a winnowing basket.

"Come and see, come and see," she sang, her voice reaching into the stillness behind the shuttered windows.

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

"Come and hear the tale of the Corn Maid and the Farmer's Son."

The doors began opening. Slowly, warily, the people of Kitso Royap came out to hear the story spun for them.

Yohn blinked. The wormhole opened into a vast cavern filled with nacreous light. Milk-white trees grew round a lake like an obsidian mirror. A white sand path undulated through the trees and climbed to a clump of stalagmites melted together to form a pimple of a hill with a structure on top that was more like a marble tomb than a dwelling.

Yohn watched the man walk briskly down a long slanting path to the irregular floor of the cavern.

She tried to shift.

No. His hold was too strong for her.

Seething with anger she ran down the path, her claws kicking up sprays of sand; as she raced past him, she snarled, hating the pleasure he got out of watching her move.

She wheeled, waited for him, crouching, muscles taut. Shaping a word in her mind, she flung it at him with all the strength in her. *WHY!*

He stopped in front of her. "Because you're a rare and beautiful creature and now you're mine."

NO.

He folded his arms and smiled at her.

She glared at him, but her mindvoice was quieter when she bespoke him again. *Let me be what I am.*

"No."

Why?

"Because I wish it. You're in my domain and you will play by my rules. Stay." Leaving her frozen by the word, he strolled up the path and settled himself on a white marble bench carved into the front of the tomb. A wave of his hand released her, then he sat with his arms crossed, his eyes half closed, watching her.

She mimed burying excrement, yipped her contempt, then went trotting about the cavern, looking for another way out.

A herd of large white rabbits went scurrying in frantic flight as she ambled past. *Hm, you'll do for food.* White squirrels shrieked at her from the limbs of the white trees. She laughed at them. *And you'll feel my teeth soon enough.*

She rounded a group of twisted polychrome stalagmites and came suddenly on half a hundred jewel-bright songbirds marching across the ground, pecking at insects in grass like white fur. They burst into the air with a loud chuff of their wings and fled to the trees, twittering warnings to each other.

By the time she'd circled the huge chamber and found that there was one way out and only one, the glow from the domed ceiling was puddling into smaller and smaller spots in a weird parody of nightfall. The songbirds flew into the trees and settled to sleep; a great snowy owl came from a hole in the walls somewhere and swooped about in eerie silence, keeping a wary eye on Yohn.

She glanced at the thing on the hill.

The bench was empty. Sometime in her wanderings the man had gone inside.

She ran up the tomb and pawed at the door, but wasn't surprised when she found she couldn't shift the latch. She yipped her frustration and went trotting back to the lake, lapped thirstily. The water was cold and clean, but tasted flat without the vivifying touch of the sun.

A ghostly reflection of the owl slid across the lake; she lifted her head as the owl plunged down, rose a moment later with something wriggling in its talons.

The scent of fresh blood reached her nostrils. Not the owl's kill. This was behind her. She wheeled. Stared.

A platter of meat sat on a stretch of level stone, red cubes of meat, raw, warm, bloody.

Drool oozed from the corners of her mouth and she found herself standing over the platter without any awareness of how she'd got there. Her belly cramping with hunger, she pawed at the chucks of meat, sniffed at them — then tried to draw back.

She blanked again, came to herself with a piece of meat in her mouth.

Hastily she spat the meat out and went scrambling and whimpering to the lake to wash the taste of the blood from her mouth.

It was an imperative of her kind not to take into themselves any human flesh, for if they did, they would lose all capacity to walk on two legs

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

and would be forced to watch self-awareness erode with slow inevitability into the beast mind that belonged to the form they wore. That miserable djah't had bespelled a ravenous hunger into her and set out abomination for her to eat.

With her paws in the water so the pain of the cold would fight the compulsion that grew until she could think of nothing else, she lay with her muzzle resting on her outstretched front legs, her ears drooping, her eyes squeezed shut.

After an eternity, the need faded until it was bearable.

When she got to her feet again, the pile of meat was gone, replaced by a number of hard, round biscuits. She curled her lip at them and trotted off, heading toward the place where she'd seen the rabbits.

Arakney sat cross-legged on the end of the bar, the chuff chuff of the gourds adding to the hypnotic rhythm of her voice as she finished the tale she'd begun in the square. Piri crouched beside her, playing softly, winding the voice of the flute around her words.

"... Corn Maiden danced her joy in firelight and sunlight and the fallow fields grew lush with the green of her children. Thus it was in the Heart time, the Green time, so I have heard it and spin it for you."

The Inn's bar was packed with men, women, even some of the older children, all of them listening intently.

She dropped the gourds to her lap and spread her hands.

The flute sighed itself still.

The room filled with a clicking like hundreds of crickets as the listeners showed their approval by snapping their fingers.

She let this go on a short while, then lifted her voice again. "Ah, this spinning is dry work. A stoup of ale will oil my pipes while I call to mind the tale of the Cheating Trader and the Moon's sly Daughter."

Feeling very pleased with herself, she sat sipping at the thin, sour liquid the Ungava called ale and watching the bar girls hurrying from table to table with trays of the wooden mugs. The Host was rocking on his heels, thumbs in his belt, a grin threatening to split his face.

When the serving was mostly done, she took up the gourds again, sang, "Peekyew was a slippery man, or so they say, oh yes they say it...."

There was a gasp and smothered laughter from the listeners. Peekyew was what they called one of the traders who came upriver each spring when the ice was gone, well known for his ability to wheedle coin out of some of them for things that fell apart almost as soon as he was gone.

Piri danced a melody line around her words as she went on to detail Peekyew's sins and his absurd comeuppance when he tried to cheat the Moon's favorite daughter.

When she finished this time, the finger clicking sounded like a cricket stampede.

She sketched a bow, took the flute from Piri, cocked her head and grinned at her audience as the Osuni jumped down with the collecting bowl. "A thousand and a thousand tales clamor at the doors of my mind. Unlock them, my friends. Coin is the key to memory."

At the end of the next tale, the Host touched her elbow. She nodded, clapped her hands loudly. "I am reminded that the time for song is over. I will sit in the square tomorrow and trade tale for tale if you will be so kind. And in the evening we will be here to spin the stories once again."

Yohn snarled as the man came down the path from the hole that led outside. He snapped his fingers at her; compelled, she fell in behind him, following him to the marble bench where he liked to sit when he came in from his wanderings. "They call me Panak out there." He reached down and scratched between her ears. "Means the Thirst. Accurate enough, but woefully unimaginative. That's peasants for you. Do you understand how boring it all is, little were-fox? Do you understand what a blessing you are?" He slipped his hand under her muzzle, lifted his head, forcing her to meet his eyes. "There are visitors in the valley. And there's you. No coincidence, I think. Hm?"

She glowered at him, concentrating on her rage to keep him out of her mind.

"Such a strong denial is the equivalent of an admission. They know what you are, don't they? No answer? Ah well, the inference is obvious — which makes that pair very interesting indeed. What if they joined you here? Company for you while I... ah... sleep." His mouth spread in a broad grin but there was no humor in his eyes. "What inferences can I draw from your flash of pleasure? Let me see. The old woman, that Story Spinner, you think she can put me down, don't you? Interesting. I'll walk warily about that one, but walk I will." He leaned against the wall, his eyes on the mother-of-pearl glow that was beginning its swift retreat to the pseudostars of the cavern night.

"I was born here, in this mountain, before the ice scraped out the valley below us. As long as the valley is, I will be. My daughters rule by daylight, but the night is mine. Your old woman that you put such confidence in, she's a wisp of smoke that my wind will blow to rags. Would blow to rags if I wished it. Much more interesting to bring her here. Down in the valley they say she has a thousand and a thousand stories locked in her head. I'll eat them one by one, little were. And eat her when she's empty."

He lifted a hand and darkness settled over her.

When she could see again, the bench was empty and the tomb's door was locked.

Boast, monster, she told herself, and tried to believe it, *brag and beat your breast, but I know my Arakney. She'll have you for lunch and your daughters for appetizers.* She lifted her muzzle, yipped a defiance that was half-forced, then set out to hunt herself a meal.

Arakney and Piri sat on stools the Storyman's daughter had brought for them after she'd carefully counted the coins they'd paid over, a little knobby woman all elbows and nose, with shrewd black eyes and a peasant's suspicion that the world was out to cheat her.

The room was shadowy and spare, the single window half obscured by a thick web of vines, the garden outside it a pocket of bright color against the brown earth of the wall. The blind old man sat in a wooden chair padded with ancient quilts that had shaped themselves to his contours and served as repositories for his body odors. The air in that room was thick enough to chew.

Arakney kept her breathing shallow and listened while he worked through his repertoire of tales, prompting him occasionally as his attention wandered. He had an odd flat style that had a certain power, but no sense of rhythm,

no music in it. So rigorously were these elements excluded, it had to be deliberate.

The Storyman's face went soft as he finished a beast tale, his head started nodding as if it were too heavy for his thin neck, his hands plucked at the quilt that padded the chair arms. Arakney leaned forward. "There's a thing I've wondered about," she murmured. "Why are there no night-songs?"

"Music calls Panak," he said. His fingers plucked and plucked, his voice was hoarse with all the speaking, but he dropped easily enough into the story. "In the time before time when beasts could speak, Pashoë the Mountain's child bore a son whose father was the Dark at the Heart of the World. He grew in her womb till the Hunger claimed him, the Thirst seized hold of him and he came forth — yes, Panak came forth and he ravaged the First Folk, sucking life from their bodies, swallowing their blood. First Man Susmoti made a song and sang Panak from the mountain and trapped Panak in the web of his words. The sons of First Man Susmoti drove iron nails through Panak's feet and bound his arms to a tuveh tree and left him for the sun to find for sunlight was his Doom. But his fear was stronger than his flesh and he tore himself free..." His voice faltered and he grew suddenly agitated. "Ah, no, I'm not to speak of that, the Panak tales, no, they're not for outsiders, no...."

His breathing quickened, he struggled to get to his feet.

Hastily Arakney lifted her voice to drown his.

"Sar é an é sarival, calmness settle over all," she crooned. "Hajina wajalart sassina pavart, banish the words that trouble the heart."

The Storyman's face smoothed out and he settled back in his chair, smiling vaguely in their direction.

With Piri whistling a liquid warble, Arakney changed the song from power to pleasure. "River is a woman with jewels in her eyes, gliding grace in a gown of shagreen. River is a woman with a murmuring voice..."

She broke off as the door opened and the daughter came scurrying into the room, her black eyes glittering with excitement. "Story Spinner, the Skawa has sent a messenger." The words came out in little pants. "Beg pardon for interrupting, but the messenger demands to speak with you. Now."

Yohn waited until Panak vanished into the exit hole, then she ran swiftly up the slant and followed him into the darkness, but he was out and gone before she reached the stone. She pushed her nose against the cold flat surface, searching for the places where he put his hands, but as she'd noticed in the Forest he had no scent, thus left none behind.

She could feel the power in the stone, crooked lines of it, but her fox-mind couldn't think in the right ways to let her comprehend and manipulate that web.

She shoved with her shoulder, her paws scraping across the gritty rock that floored the hole. It was like trying to push the mountain over with only the strength of her body.

After a while she quit and went glumly back to the great chamber. Panak was going after Arakney and Piri, but there was nothing she could do about that except grow sick with terror. If Arakney killed him, who would ever find her here?

Arakney shook her gourds and sang, "Royal was her beauty, like a queen she walked..."

The Skawa was a tall thin woman with huge black eyes in a face weary, sad, and arrogant beyond measure. Her hair was pulled back tightly, braided into many small plaits that were stiffened by gold wire and worked into an elaborate headdress. And when she looked at her daughter, her eyes were afraid, then filled with hate.

The Maskay sat on a hassock at her feet, a girl of fourteen or fifteen, so like her mother it was as if they were versions of the same woman wrenched out of time and brought improbably together. A greed for life boiled in her, pinking her cheeks and making her eyes glitter; she was pitch pine, ready to snap and spark explosively at the first touch of fire.

"Her swanlike neck, her lily hands..." Arakney sang while Piri's flute wove a web of sound about the young one and the matron, delicate, deliberately oversweet.

"He was golden as the sun..." Arakney sang.

Her face relaxing a little, a gesture of a smile lifting the corners of her mouth, the Skawa let her head rest against the chair back and the fingers of her left hand tapped in time with the music.

"His love was as strong and as warm..." Arakney sang.

The Maskay leaned forward, her mouth opening a little as she listened, her body shouting *I want... I want... I want...*

The Skawa kept them performing long after nightfall as if she couldn't bear to let them leave. Finally she lifted her head, the cold mask in place again. "I've had rooms prepared for you. There are predators in the dark that make the night quite dangerous. Story Spinner, you'll find your fee on the table beside your bed along with a late meal my cook has been instructed to provide for you. I bid you good night, may your dreams be as charming as your songs."

Arakney opened the door and let Piri slip inside.

He glanced at the door. "No key here either? Baa baa."

"F'lich! These goats have teeth." She drew a deep breath. "And we'd better get ready to bite. You ready?"

Piri grimaced. "Set the wards first. That c'fillacher transform eats energy."

Panak came halfway between midnight and dawn. He touched the powerlines sung into the wood and cursed when they burned him. The door boomed as he slammed himself into it, but it held and he screamed again as white hot wires of tamed lightning seared into his flesh.

Arakney smiled at the diminishing howls and curses as he went stomping off. She rose from the bed where she was sitting, swung the window open. "Up to you, Piri. Fly safely and don't lose him."

A large bat with fur like rusty steel wool went flapping away from the room, rising in an expanding spiral until it was lost in the clouds.

Arakney shut the window, gathered their gear and went quietly from the Waokiv, headed for the Inn, Dapple and the van.

Yohn paced restlessly back and forth along the shore of the lake. At last terror overtook her and she trotted up the path to the hole, stood with her head in the darkness listening for Panak. She shivered and panted, thought about trying to run past him when he rolled back the stone, wondered if anyone would ever come here,

if he were dead and gone. Like the Oggeri, caught in Arakney's songspell, black leaves burning in the rain. Like the Kuh'kwah'to, its heart exploded by the music from Piri's flute.

Shuddering, she crept through the darkness until she reached the slab that closed the hole. She crouched with her body pressed against the stone, waiting....

The slab started to shift.

She scrambled to her feet, stood taut, ready to move.

The gap widened.

She leapt — and went flying back as Panak's foot caught her in the ribs. She slammed into the cave wall and tumbled into a heap. By the time she was on her feet again, the slab was in place and she could hear him striding off through the darkness. She started after him, biting back a whimper as a cracked rib sent pain shooting through her with every step she took.

Arakney slid off Dapple's back and walked cautiously through unstable scree to the boulder where Piri sat.

"Gone to ground?"

"Other side of the stream." He flipped a hand at a faint pink line touching the peaks on the far side of the valley. "Sun's nearly up. We'd better get ready to call him out."

Yohn lifted her head.

The stone of the mountain was singing.

Though pain pulled a cough from her, she got to her feet and stood listening, trying to understand what was happening.

The door to the tomb slid open and Panak came out.

He stood listening to the music, his face glowing with an inexpressible delight.

Overhead the pearly light gathered into the pseudostars started curdling and the stalagmites scattered about the cavern floor swayed in a slow eerie emulation of the limber white trees. Fingerling waves raced across the lake and lapped at the sand.

Fear a cold lump in her belly, Yohn limped past rabbits that sat on their haunches, blind eyes staring at nothing, past flocks of songbirds that swirled into the air, settled again, rose again in aimless distracted flight. She climbed the long slope to the entrance hole, but couldn't make herself go into it.

The music grew louder and louder.

Piri's flute.

Crystallized beauty too sweet to endure.

She heard the crunch of feet on the sand, turned her head.

That terrible ecstasy contorting his face, Panak walked past her, following the flutesong as if it were a leash drawing him on.

Yohn limped after him, belly drawn up to minimize the pain.

Sunlight was fire burning her eyes.

Near blind from the pain-tears she stumbled across the scree and into the soothing shadow under the trees.

Panak stood on the bank of the stream, trapped in the spell of the music.

As the sun rose higher, he grew more tenuous.

Piri played on and on until the last wisps of the ancient horror were gone as simply as fog melted into air and nothing by the heat of a summer sun.

* * *

Yohn shifted finally and came unsteadily into the sunlight, walking on two legs for the first time in days. The ground was trembling under her, the whole mountain was groaning. She watched as a hole opened in the bed of the creek and sucked the water down.

"Yohn. Quick."

The shout woke her from her daze.

She scrambled across the muddy creek bed, pressed herself against Arakney, shivering so hard she couldn't speak.

Arakney stroked her tangled hair a moment, then she said, "There's time for that later. We've got to get away from here."

Yohn looked over her shoulder.

Billows of black dust were climbing into the sky where the mountain was falling in on itself and in an eerie echo of that collapse, the House called Waokiv was crumbling into rubble. She shivered and went back to watching the road vanish under Dapple's hooves. "Where now?"

"Where the wind blows," Arakney said, "and Fate decrees."

❄

Jo Clayton lives and writes in Portland, Oregon, and explains this story as follows: "On my balcony I have a baby oak tree. It was a gift, a combination of a chip of oak wood and Portland rains and a woody will to exist. Sometimes when a short story happens for me, it comes like that, the meeting and sudden flowering of separate lines of thought. This story was one of those."

Nicholas Jainschigg lives in New York City with his wife Monica (whose mother is the artist's model for Arakney) and a grey-cheeked parakeet. He won the Jack Gaughan Memorial Award for Best Emerging Artist ("What I'm emerging from is not mentioned," he notes), and was recently Artist Guest of Honor at Boskone.

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

When Caitlin Emerson was ten she accidentally turned her brother Kevin into a toad. She didn't mean to do it, but he teased her and teased her about how Toby Jordan was her boyfriend, and she absolutely *hated* Toby. She went to her room and slammed the door and sat on her bed and got madder and madder at Kevin.

Then he opened her door without knocking, stuck his head in, and said, "I bet he'll give you a big smoochy valentine," and that did it. She pointed at him and said in icy tones, "Kevin, you are a toad." And he was.

She was two when she worked her first spell, and three before she really understood that she could point, and say a few words, and whatever she said, happened. But she was a kindly little girl, usually, and well treated by her family. So, usually, her spells did no damage, and in fact were barely noticed by others.

Her brother Kevin, who was five years older, thought she was outrageously spoiled, for he had noticed that she got whatever she wanted. But she had such a sunny disposition that he couldn't really hate her. He teased her, and called her 'pest' and 'nuisance' to his friends, but in fact he was pretty fond of her, most of the time.

When she was five she discovered to her astonishment that Kevin couldn't point at things, and say words, and have things come out the way he wanted.

By the time she was six, and in the first grade, Caitlin had learned that she didn't have to point to get what she wanted. She just had to think about it in a special pointing kind of way. In fact, she had to be careful not to wish for bad things, because sometimes they happened and then there was trouble.

Like the time she wished she could be the little girl in the Christmas play, the most important part, instead of just one of the elves. And Wendy Brown, who was supposed to be the little girl, came down with chicken pox, so Caitlin got the part. Nobody else knew what she had done, but she felt terrible about it, and forgot her lines, and the whole play was just awful.

After that she was mostly careful, and thought about things a long time before she wished for them in the pointing way.

Until Kevin teased her about Toby Jordan.

Now she put both hands over her mouth, her eyes wide with astonishment and horror. "Oh Kevin," she whispered, "I didn't mean to do that."

The toad looked up at her from its position just inside the open door of her room. It was huge, big as a soccer ball, kind of a reddish-brown, and cov-

Artwork by Lori Deitrich

Caitlin's Magic

by Jackie Shank

ered with big ugly white warts. It blinked its shiny round black eyes at her and said, "Co-ak." It took one hop toward her, which made her jump backwards with a little shriek.

She pointed a shaking finger at the ugly beast and said, "Kevin, you are a boy." But he wasn't, he was still a big toad.

"Co-ak," he said, blinked again, and turned toward the door.

"Oh no, you don't," she said and, easing around the animal, pushed the door shut. Bad enough she had turned her brother into a toad, she wasn't going to have him roaming the house. He shut his eyes and was so still she thought maybe he'd gone to sleep.

Caitlin squatted down and examined him more closely. He had five fingers on each hand. Or were they feet? Never mind, he had four sets of five, which made twenty. Math whiz, that's what I am, Caitlin thought. The warts looked a lot like the one she had had on her right hand, until the day she thought of pointing at it with her left hand and telling it to go away.

I wonder how big he is, she thought. She went to her desk, rooted around until she found her ruler, and took it back to where the toad sat. She put the ruler on the floor beside him. Wow, nearly a foot long. She didn't know toads got that big.

He opened his eyes, said, "Co-ak," and hopped toward her bed. She started after him, saying, "Don't you dare get on my bed!" But he scuttled underneath, turned so that he was facing her, and shut his eyes again.

She pulled herself up as tall as she could, pointed at the toad, and said in a firm voice, "Kevin, you are not a toad, you are a boy." Nothing changed. "Please?" she added, but the magic word seemed to have lost its power.

"Caitlin," her mother's voice called. "Come and set the table."

Oh crumbs, just what I needed, Caitlin thought. "Coming," she called. She looked around, then went and shut her closet door, and the dresser drawer that was gaping open. No point giving the toad too many places to hide while she was gone.

She made sure her room door was firmly shut, washed her hands in the bathroom across the hall, and went downstairs.

"Caitlin," her mother said, straightening up and shutting the oven door, "you have a clock, and you know this is your week to set the table. I shouldn't have to holler at you and remind you."

Oh crumbs, Caitlin thought again, Mom's had a bad day at school again. Probably those darn McGilly twins, they'd give anyone fits.

Caitlin's mother, Kim, was a kindergarten aide in the school where Caitlin was a fifth grader. Some days when the kids were wild, Caitlin's mother came home just frazzled, and then look out.

Caitlin very quietly put placemats, silver, napkins, salt and pepper, and water glasses on the table in the family room. "How many hot pads?" she asked.

"Two, no, three," Mom said. "There's your dad," she added, as a car pulled into the garage. "Go tell him dinner will be about half an hour." Caitlin started out to the garage. "And then go get Kevin," her mother said.

Uh oh, Caitlin thought, now what do I do?

She hugged her dad, told him when dinner would be, and started up the stairs. I'll try once more, she thought, opening the door to her room carefully. Kevin the toad was still crouched under her bed. Gosh, if I changed him back right there, he'd bump his head on the bottom of the mattress, she thought.

She got down on her knees and reached for him, but he said "Co-ak" and crept farther back.

"OK," she said, "bump your head, see if I care." She stood up, pointed, and said, very firmly, "Kevin Emerson, you are not a toad, you are a boy." She had a feeling 'please' wouldn't do any good, and she was right.

Kevin said, "Co-ak."

She went into the hall, shutting the door behind her. Now what? She went to Kevin's room, hoping against hope to find that he was doing his homework and that the toad was a figment of her imagination. But his room was empty. She checked the entire upstairs part of the house, went downstairs and checked the living room, and glanced into the family room and kitchen on her way to the garage. No Kevin.

In the garage were all the things that were usually there — cars, washer and dryer, workbench, boxes, cupboards, but no Kevin. Well, of course no Kevin. Had she really expected to find him out here oiling his bike or something?

His bike! He was changed into a toad and hiding under her bed, but his bike was gone. How could that be? Could someone have come in and stolen it? How could they do that? The garage doors had electric openers, there were no handles on the outside. The door to the back yard was locked.

She almost ran in the house to announce that Kevin's bike was missing. But then she thought about where Kevin really was. Under her bed, saying Co-ak. Maybe this was not a good time to tell Mom and Dad about the bike.

She was still trying to decide what to tell her parents when she walked into the family room.

"Where's Kevin?" her mother asked, putting a platter of oven-baked chicken on the table.

"I don't know," Caitlin said, "I can't find him anywhere. And his bike's gone."

Caitlin's father, Bruce, said, "Oh, for crying out loud." He and Mom said it was better to say that than to swear in the presence of the children. He went on now, "I suppose he's gone off with one of his pals and forgotten what time it is."

"But it's dark," Mom said, just as if that had ever stopped Kevin if he wanted to go somewhere.

Dad looked at the clock on the wall.

"We'll give him another half hour before we worry," he said, looking worried.

Mom got up and went to the window. "I don't know, Bruce, it isn't like him to be late for dinner."

"Come sit down, honey, and let's eat before everything gets cold," Dad said. "Help yourself to the chicken, Caitlin, and then pass it this way."

Caitlin could see that her parents were really worried about Kevin, and she wanted to reassure them, but she wasn't sure that telling them she had turned him into a toad would be especially reassuring.

And the missing bike bothered her. What on earth could have happened to it? She *knew* Kevin was upstairs in her room. And she *knew* that he would never loan the bike to anyone. So where could it be?

Mrs. Emerson suddenly got to her feet. "I'm going to call the police," she said, starting for the phone.

"Wait, Kim," Mr. Emerson said, "don't start with the police, start with his friends. If his bike is gone, he's probably off with one of them."

"You're right," she said, getting out the phone book. She dialed a number, and while it rang she said, "Wait'll I get my hands on that kid... oh, hi Marge. This is Kim Emerson. Is Kevin with Mike? Uh huh, OK, no, no problem. He's late for dinner, which is unusual, but he'll turn up. Thanks anyway. OK, I'll try them. G'bye."

She shook her head, looking up another number, dialing, getting the same answer, trying again, and yet again, until she couldn't think of anyone else to try.

Caitlin slipped away upstairs, and went into her room. Kevin was still crouched under her bed. He blinked at her and sneezed. She didn't know toads could sneeze. I wonder if it's the dust under there, she thought. Maybe Mom's right, maybe I ought to clean a little better. But not tonight.

Now what? She had to get him out of there. "Kevin, come out," she said, pointing at him.

She lay down on the floor and reached, but he was too far back.

He said, "Co-ak," but didn't move.

She stood up. "I wonder if one of Dad's butterfly nets would work," she thought. "Nah, it's too small, and too flimsy." She sat down on the bed.

"Co-ak!" Kevin said, as the bottom of the mattress sagged a little.

That gave her an idea. She took off her shoes and climbed on the bed and began to jump up and down. He didn't like that a bit, for he said "Co-ak" several times. Then he crawled out from under the bed and hopped toward a corner of the room.

She took the pillowcase off her pillow and went after him. He hopped, she chased, he hopped, she chased. But at last he hopped too slowly. She brought the opening of the pillowcase down on him like the mouth of the vacuum. She was on her knees, holding the open edge of the case to the floor while he hopped up and down inside it, but he was trapped.

"Gotcha!" she said, just as the door to her room opened.

"Caitlin," her father said, "what in the world is all this racket up here? Haven't we got enough problems, worrying about your brother?"

Kevin continued to wriggle and hop, trying to get out of the pillowcase, but he only worked his way up toward the closed end. As her father opened her door, Caitlin finally was able to get the mouth of the case closed and stand up, clutching the case with both hands.

A muffled "Co-ak" came from inside the case.

"What have you got in there?" Dad asked.

"Um, it's Kevin," she said. "He's a toad."

"You've got a toad in that pillowcase?" he asked.

"Yes, but..."

"And you named it after your brother? I don't think that's very nice, Caitlin."

Artwork by Lori Deitrich

"No, Dad, I didn't name the toad *after* Kevin, it *is* Kevin. I turned him into a toad, accidentally, and I can't turn him back. I'm sorry." She hung her head.

He put a finger under her chin and tipped her head up. "Honey, sometime when we're not so worried about Kevin, remind me to talk to you about your overworked imagination. You need to use a little better judgment about when to tell whoppers and when not."

"But Dad, I'm not telling a whopper," she said. Giving the bag a small shake, which resulted in a loud but muffled protest from Kevin, she said, "This really is Kevin, my brother Kevin. I told you, I..."

Dad ran his hands through his hair, something he did when he was upset. "Caitlin," he said, "I haven't got time for that now, we have to organize a search. Put the toad in the back yard. You can't keep it up here. And then go to the family room. We'll probably want you to answer the phone or something."

He turned and went downstairs, leaving Caitlin standing with the pillowcase still twitching in her hand. "But, Dad," she said out loud, although he was out of earshot, "I can't just put him in the back yard, it's cold out there. I know, I'll take him over to Eleanor's house for a while." Eleanor, who lived next door, was Caitlin's best friend.

She looked around for something to tie the bag shut so she could put on her jacket. Finally she settled on the belt from her best blue dress. Fortunately Kevin was relatively quiet for a minute, so she managed to wrap the belt three times around the neck of the pillowcase and make a square knot, which she had just learned to tie.

She picked up the bag by its neck and put it over her shoulder. Like a Santa Claus sack, she thought. She tiptoed to the top of the stairs and listened. Mom and Dad were in the family room, talking. She crept down the stairs to the closet in the hall where her jacket hung. Putting down the bag, opening the door, getting the jacket and putting it on — all this took only a minute or two.

She opened the front door and slipped out, shutting it quietly behind her. She was nearly at the end of the front walk when a police car came around the corner to her left, onto her street, its red and blue lights flashing. She thought, thank goodness Eleanor's house is the other direction. She turned quickly to the right and started along the road.

Artwork by Lori Deitrich

"I am invisible," she said aloud, perhaps to Kevin, perhaps just to convince herself.

"Oh no, you're not," a voice said, practically in her ear. "But you're surely in a heap of trouble."

"Miss Fox!" Caitlin said, when she had calmed down a little from the fright the voice had given her. "What are you doing here?"

Miss Fox was her piano teacher, the one who kept telling Mom that Caitlin had a lot of talent so that Caitlin had to keep taking lessons even though she hated them. Miss Fox lived a few blocks from Caitlin.

"What am I doing here?" Miss Fox said. "I'm trying to pull your chestnuts out of the fire."

"Huh?"

"You're too young to know that expression," said Miss Fox, who was about a hundred and ninety-seven. "It means I'm trying to get you out of the trouble you've made for yourself."

"What trouble?" Caitlin said evasively. Did Miss Fox think she was running away or something? Maybe she did. After all, she, Caitlin, had a bag over her shoulder. For all Miss Fox knew, it might contain her pajamas and a sandwich.

"The trouble you made when you turned your brother into a toad," Miss Fox said.

Kevin said, "Co-ak." He sounded sad.

Caitlin stopped walking. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said, trying to sound cool, "and this is

where I turn off. I'm just going to visit my friend Eleanor."

A steely hand grabbed her arm. "Oh no, you're not," Miss Fox said in a steely voice. "You're coming to visit *me*." She hurried Caitlin past Eleanor's front walk. "You and your brother Kevin both."

For a woman not much taller than Caitlin, she moved with astonishing speed. Caitlin was practically running to keep up.

"You do realize," Miss Fox went on, "that by leaving the house surreptitiously you have created another severe worry for your parents?"

"What's syrup-whatever?" Caitlin asked.

"Secretly, on the sly, mysteriously," Miss Fox said. Her voice sounded impatient.

"Well, why would me leaving syrup-whatever-ly make Mom and Dad worry?"

"I have always maintained, to the rest of the group, that you were a reasonably intelligent young person, Caitlin. Are you really so rattled by what you have done that you hadn't realized that your parents will worry about where you are, as well as where your brother is?"

"Oh crumbs," Caitlin said. "But I couldn't very well just put Kevin in the back yard. It *is* cold out here. And I was only going to be gone a minute over to Eleanor's. *You're* the one that's keeping me away from the house."

"Point taken," Miss Fox said. Caitlin didn't bother to ask what that meant, she was too out of breath. "Well, we'll work it out somehow. Here we are, come inside and let's see what you've made of your brother."

They went up the steps to Miss Fox's front door, into the hall, and turned left into the living room. The room was shabby and comfortable.

"Bring him over here and let's have a look," Miss Fox said, turning on a lamp at one end of the faded red sofa. Caitlin reluctantly carried the pillowcase to where Miss Fox was waiting. She put it down on the floor under the lamp.

"Well, come along, untie it, child."

"But he might get away," Caitlin said.

"Not in *my* house," Miss Fox said. "I control all things in my house."

"You do? How come?" she asked.

"Because I am a sorcerer, of course,"

Artwork by Lori Deitrich

Miss Fox said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Now untie the bag, Caitlin."

"*You're* a *sorcerer*?" Caitlin's eyes grew huge with astonishment. "You can't be a sorcerer, you're a piano teacher."

"I am both, Caitlin, and I am also getting impatient. Explanations can wait until later. Untie the bag. Carefully, dear, that looks like the belt from the dress you wore during your recital last month."

"It is," Caitlin said. "I couldn't find anything else to use."

She finished untying the square knot, which had become rather tangled, and jammed the belt into the pocket of her jacket.

Miss Fox opened the pillowcase and looked in. She looked at Caitlin, and looked back in the bag. "I don't believe this," she muttered, and let the top of the pillowcase down so it rested on the floor with Kevin blinking in the middle, like a prune in a bowl of whipped cream.

"Co-ak," he said, and started to hop.

"You stay right where you are," Miss Fox said.

He said, "Co-ak," and shut his eyes. Caitlin thought he heaved a big sigh, but she wasn't sure. But he didn't hop. She heard a funny noise, and looked around.

Miss Fox was staring at Kevin and laughing. She started with a chuckle, then giggled, then went on to huge whoops, gasping for breath, tears running down her cheeks. She laughed and laughed and laughed, while Caitlin stood on one foot and then the other, and felt herself turning bright red. Was Miss Fox laughing at her?

Miss Fox sat down on the sofa, still laughing, mopping her face with a handkerchief she pulled out of thin air. She drew a deep breath, and Caitlin thought she was going to say something, but then she burst out laughing again. Caitlin fidgeted with the zipper on her jacket.

Miss Fox stopped long enough to say, "I'm sorry, Caitlin, I'm not laughing at you. Or at least, not mostly. But that is absolutely the funniest-looking toad I ever saw." Miss Fox whooped again.

Caitlin cocked her head and looked at Kevin critically. "He looks OK to me," she said.

"Well of course he does, Caitlin, you made him up. But my dear, *five* toes on each foot? Cinnamon-colored? And *human* warts? And *eyelashes*?" She laughed again, but more quietly this time. "Bufo buffoon, he is," she said.

"Huh?"

"Bufo is the family name of toads. A buffoon is a clown. You have not only turned your brother into a toad, you have turned him into a very funny imaginary toad, you clever girl."

Miss Fox patted the sofa next to herself. "Now," she said, "sit down, dear, and relax. I must think." She shut her eyes.

Caitlin sat down and tried to pull a Kleenex out of thin air.

Without opening her eyes, Miss Fox said, "No, my dear, that is beyond your present level of skill." Caitlin hastily sat on her hands. "Though I would have said changing a boy into a toad would have been beyond your abilities, too," Miss Fox went on in a musing tone, as if to herself.

"Miss Fox," Caitlin asked hesitantly, "how did you know... um?"

"How did I know what you had done?" Caitlin nodded. "I felt it dear, as did, I daresay, every member of S.O.S. within a few hundred miles."

"S.O.S.?"

"The Secret Order of Sorcerers."

Seeing Caitlin's puzzled expression, she added, "You might call it the sorcerers' guild."

Kevin said, "Co-ak." Apparently he was feeling left out.

"If you're a sorcerer, you can turn Kevin back into a boy, can't you?" Caitlin asked hopefully.

"Oh yes," Miss Fox said, "that's the easy part."

"The *easy* part?" Caitlin wondered what the hard part could be.

"The hard part is getting both you and Kevin reunited with your family, with plausible explanations for both your absences. And seeing to it that you don't pull any more such awful boners."

Caitlin looked down at her hands. She had to admit that turning Kevin into a toad was an awful boner, but she was secretly kind of proud that she'd been able to do it. She hoped Miss Fox couldn't read her mind.

Miss Fox said, "Caitlin, go in the music room and practice `Für Elise'. I have to make a phone call."

In other words, Caitlin thought, you don't want me to hear. She got to her feet with a scowl, which Miss Fox ignored, and went to the piano, which was across the hall in what would be the dining room in a normal house. Miss Fox shut the double doors to the living room.

But she's going to talk to someone about me, and I want to hear what she's saying, Caitlin thought. She pointed at the piano. "Play `Für Elise' just the way I would," she told it, "with mistakes and back-ups and everything." She watched in delighted astonishment as the keys began to go down, and her hesitant rendition of Beethoven's classic began to be played. *Wow!* she thought. *It worked.*

Then she tiptoed to the living room doors and put her ear to the crack between.

"It's the funniest toad you ever saw, Marvin," Miss Fox's voice came. "Human warts and eyelashes, you can't believe it. The trouble of course is that she doesn't know how to change him back... Well, of course I can, and restore him to the bosom of his family, too. They think he's lost... But don't you see, the child has great powers, but she's only ten and her judgment is not very good."

Well, I like that, Caitlin thought. I've been able to do stuff since I was little, and this is the first *really* bad thing I've done.

"... I thought maybe we ought to take her power away entirely, until she's more mature," Miss Fox continued.

Oh crumbs, Caitlin thought. She was mad and scared at the same time. They wouldn't really do that, would they? That would be awful!

Then Miss Fox said, "No, most of her activities have been quite benign." Caitlin tried to think what benign meant, but couldn't.

There was a long pause. Then Miss Fox said, "Oh. That's too bad. Even S.O.S. can't take her power away? Are you sure?" Caitlin heaved a big sigh of relief.

"Marvin, it's all very well to say we must guide her," Miss Fox said. She sounded irritated. "I've been trying to do that since she was six. Why do you think I keep telling her mother how talented she is? I have to keep her coming to me as a student... Actually, she's not bad. Not brilliant, but not bad, but..." Then there was a long pause during which Miss Fox said really interesting things like "yes" and "I see" and "right". Caitlin wondered what Marvin, whoever he was, was saying.

Then she heard Miss Fox saying good-

bye, and scurried back to the piano. "You can stop now," she whispered as she sat down on the bench. When Miss Fox opened the living room doors, Caitlin was playing, studiously following the music, biting her bottom lip to keep from grinning.

"Come in here, Caitlin," Miss Fox called. "We're ready to decide what to do."

They sat down where they had been before.

"Well, I've talked to the head of the local chapter of S.O.S.," Miss Fox said. "We will take Kevin out onto a road some way into the forest, one which he rides frequently on his bike. Do you know of one?"

"Oh sure," Caitlin said. "He likes to ride out to Little Creek Park. But his bike is missing too, somebody stole it."

"No," Miss Fox said, "it's right here, on my back porch. I had a feeling we'd need it sooner or later, so I brought it."

Wow, Caitlin thought, I wish I knew how to move things like that, even through locked doors.

"Little Creek Road it is, then," Miss Fox went on. "And we'll put him out there with a flat tire, which will explain why he's been missing."

"Yeah, but he'll remember being a toad and he'll tell Mom and Dad, and..."

"No." Miss Fox shook her head. "We'll see to it that he remembers riding out, and his tire going flat, and having to walk the bike back home. He'll even worry about your parents worrying."

"You can make people remember things that didn't happen?" Caitlin's eyes were huge with amazement and pleasure. Oh boy, she thought, that's neat.

"We can." Miss Fox frowned at her severely. "But we don't, except in *dire* emergencies. It takes a great deal of power, it's exhausting, and it's morally wrong."

Oh crumbs, another thing I'm not powerful enough to do, Caitlin thought. "Can you read minds, too?" she asked.

"Certainly not," Miss Fox said, "but I can tell from the expression on your face that you've been thinking things you don't want me to know about."

Caitlin shook her head. "No I haven't," she said, trying to look innocent.

"Well, let it pass," Miss Fox said, getting up. "Time to get Kevin out where he can be found." She frowned at Caitlin. "But what on earth we'll do with you I don't know."

"Why don't I just go home?" Caitlin asked.

"Because by now your parents have surely discovered that you, too, are missing. They'll be frantic."

Caitlin hung her head. She didn't *have* a bike, so what could they say to explain where she had been?

"Why *did* you leave the house, by the way?"

Caitlin told her about Dad not believing the toad was Kevin and telling her to put it in the yard. "But it's too cold in the yard," she said, "so I *was* going to take the toad to Eleanor's house, and then go back home."

"Hmmm," Miss Fox said, scratching her head and looking at Caitlin thoughtfully. "Now I want you to think carefully, Caitlin. What *would* you have done if Kevin had simply been missing?"

"Answered the phone, I guess, like Dad said," Caitlin replied.

Miss Fox sat down again. "You are fond of Kevin," she said. "Aren't you?" Caitlin nodded.

Kevin said, "Co-ak."

Miss Fox looked at him and said, "Not much longer." She turned back to Caitlin. "So let us suppose that you decided that you knew where Kevin would be, and that you started out walking, to find him. After all, you are only ten."

Caitlin shook her head. "I'm only ten," she said, "but I'm not *that* dumb. It's *dark* out there!"

"Then think of a better idea!" Miss Fox snapped.

"Well, if you can tell Kevin that he went for a ride on his bike, can't you tell everyone that I was at home all this time?"

Miss Fox looked at her watch. "That might work," she said, nodding. "It's only been half an hour." She jumped to her feet. "Yes, that will have to do. But I'll need some help. Let me just make another phone call."

"Couldn't I help?" Caitlin asked.

"No," Miss Fox said, dialing. "Marvin," she said. "This is what we've decided to do, but S.O.S. will have to help a bit." She explained the plan. "Very well, in five minutes," she said, and hung up. She turned and said, "Caitlin, shut your eyes, because otherwise you'll get sick."

Caitlin shut her eyes. She opened them when she heard Miss Fox say, "You may open them now."

She was in her room, and the toad was gone, and she didn't have her jacket on. She went downstairs and checked; there it hung, in the hall closet. She went into the family room, where Mom was just hanging up the phone.

"They've found him," she said, tears running down her face. "He's OK."

"Where?" Dad said. Caitlin tried to look really interested, as if she didn't have any idea where.

"Out on Little Creek Road. His bike had a flat and he was walking it home. Oh, thank goodness, thank goodness!" They hugged each other. Dad, Caitlin noticed, had tears in *his* eyes too. She heaved a big sigh. So everything really is OK, she thought, just like Miss Fox said.

Two days later, after all the excitement had died down, Caitlin had another piano lesson, where she not only had to practice 'Für Elise' she also had to sit still and listen to a lecture about using her power responsibly. But I knew that, she thought, or at least *now* I know that.

The next week, on Valentine's Day, Toby Jordan gave her a valentine, before school, but it wasn't a smoochy one. It said, "Roses are red, violets are blue, homework's a pain, and so are you."

She saw that he was watching her, to see how she'd react. She smiled sweetly and blew him a kiss, and laughed when he turned bright red and walked away. Kevin will love this, she thought, gazing at the valentine. I can't wait to show it to him.

❄

Jackie Shank is a retired elementary school teacher, living in Pacific City, Oregon with her husband. She laments that retirement has not brought as much spare time as she had hoped, but that whatever there is, is occupied by writing. She found out about this, her first fiction sale, two days before her birthday — never mind *which* birthday, she says.

Lori Deitrick has been published in Aboriginal Science Fiction Magazine, and Amazing Stories Magazine. Her fantasy originals have won numerous awards and grace the walls in the homes of many collectors. She is also known for her sensitive portraiture and wildlife work. She shares a studio in Knoxville, Tennessee with artist husband David Deitrick, and three children.

Whom the Gods Would Discipline

by Edwina Mayer

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

But for the old man's navy blazer and gray slacks, the scene might have predated antiquity. The cloaked priestess stood atop a broad, flat stone, her arms raised to a star-encrusted sky, and chanted in a tongue already dead when the Acropolis was nothing but a windswept hill. At first, Euryale had been filled with doubt; in fact, as she ascended to the ruined temple she was unable even to recall the order of the verses. But the moment she had stepped within the sacred circle, she could feel the words coming from deep within her, and had only just enough time to turn to the old man, who followed a few steps behind, and remind him that if this worked, he must not look. Then the summons came bubbling out from some cavern of ancient memory, and she forgot about him.

Euryale chanted, and the obsidian night darkened while the stars took on the rich tones of rare jewels. At the same time a beating, backed by a sighing whisper of wind, began in a far corner of the island and drew nearer with each syllable she uttered. Suddenly, a blot blacker than the rest of the sky appeared in the east and drew closer, obliterating the stars as it came. In descent it resolved into a winged silhouette that finally settled in the shadows just beyond the circle of fallen pillars.

"Who summons me?" The words were a sibilant hiss in the same tongue as the priestess' incantation.

Euryale dropped her arms to her sides. "Don't you know me, Sthenno?" The shadow leaned forward a little, but did not speak. After a while, Euryale shrugged. "Well," she said, "it's been a long time. Perhaps you have forgotten."

Silence, filled only with the sound of waves as they broke against the distant shore, stretched on and on. Finally, Sthenno deigned to reply. "I haven't forgotten. But I'm surprised. I'd thought, after so long, that you found my presence too detestable to bear."

The words stung, like salt spray on a burn. "Not detestable," Euryale said stiffly. "Painful."

"Then why do you call me now?"

Euryale pointed to the old man where he huddled, a trembling lump bent nearly double, his arms wrapped about his head. So it always was with his kind. At another time he might of amused her, but terror and power were a dangerous combination. He needed careful handling.

"This man is owed a debt," Euryale said.

"I've paid his ancestors. I will pay him nothing."

"He has a tablet, marked with your seal, that says there is one installment still outstanding."

"Nevertheless," hissed Sthenno, "I have paid all that I intend to pay."

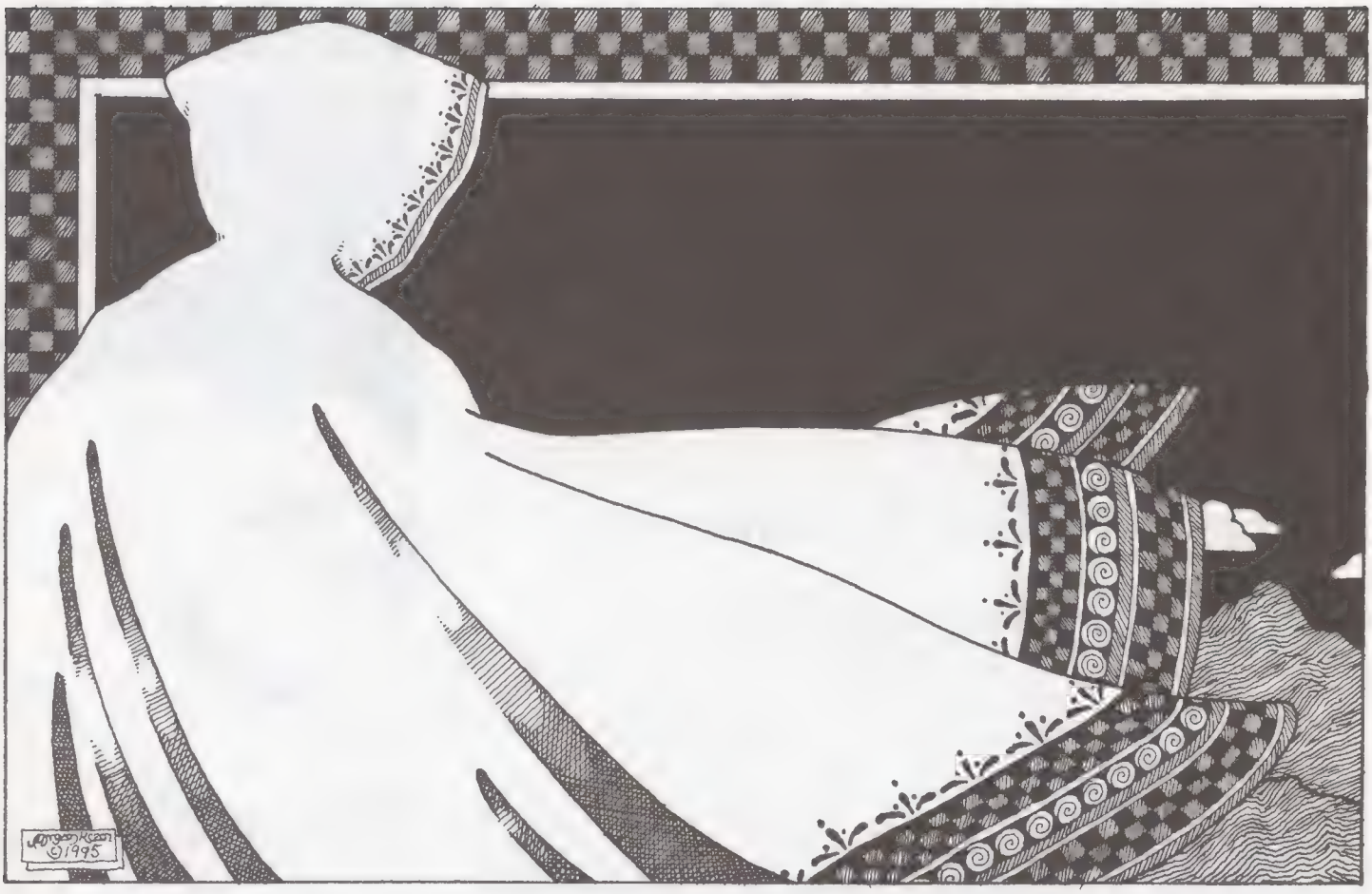
"You promised more," said Euryale.

Sthenno stepped from the shadows. In the moonlight, her hair was an undulating nimbus, and the tarnished scales that covered her slender body glinted dully. "I promised too much."

Though her name meant strength, she trembled, and Euryale took a step toward her. "Sthenno," she asked uncertainly, "what's wrong?"

"I have done all I can do," she replied. "I am alone. I am emptied out." Sthenno spread her wings to return to her lair, hidden somewhere in one of the hundreds of caves that lined the rocky beach. With two strong beats, she rose rapidly into the night sky. Euryale watched as the silhouette grew less distinct and finally disappeared.

"You can uncover your eyes now," she said. The modern words sounded flat after the lilting cadences of the old language.



The old man sat up slowly, blinking. "Well?" he asked.

The priestess shook her head. "She refuses." Rightfully.

"Then who will pay?" he demanded.

Euryale pulled her cloak closer around her, and peered at him from within her cowl. "It's cold here in the wind," she said. "Let's go back. Then we'll talk ."

"The agreement is clear," the old man insisted. "Unless the twentieth figure is delivered — on time — this island will continue to belong to me and my family."

It would have been useless to remind him, ancient deeds, titles and agreements notwithstanding, that the island had been dedicated to the Goddess for generations before the old man's ancestors had so much as set foot upon its shore, so Euryale didn't bother. With difficulty, she controlled the venom in her voice. "I've seen the tablet. I know what it says."

"Then you know that Sthenno is in default." With a little groan, he sat down heavily on a marble bench nestled in his garden among low-hanging olive branches. "Please join me," he said. "I'm not so old yet that I feel comfortable sitting in the presence of a woman."

She settled on the other end of the bench and thought about the options. When the old man had come out onto the peninsula and demanded that someone "make Sthenno comply", Euryale had first scolded him for disturbing the privacy of the secluded little community, and then tried to send him away. But that was before the old spider had clarified the stakes. After that, there was no choice. Somehow, the old man would have his twentieth figure.

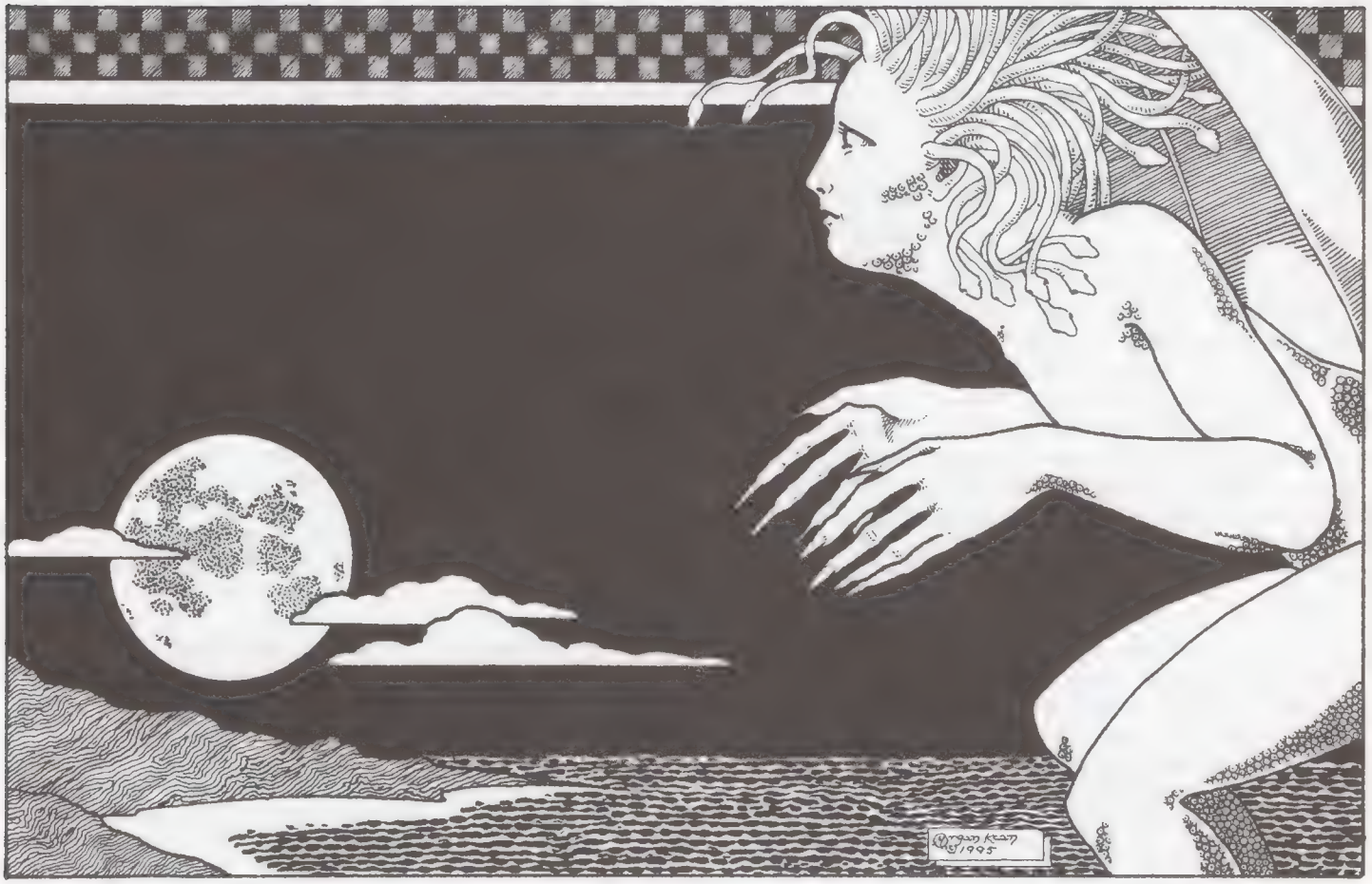
Though it was too dark to see them now, she had studied the figures that afternoon where they stood scattered in nooks and crannies of the garden. She had to admit that they fascinated her. There were shepherds and nobles, a Greek Orthodox priest, and a group of three squatting children with disturbingly feral eyes, a beautiful woman with a cinched-in waist and a high, Elizabethan collar, and a man in the tight knee breeches and wig of an eighteenth-century gentleman. The oldest figure, dating back twenty centuries, was a priestess of her own sect; the robes and cowl could have been Euryale's, had they been made of white cotton rather than stone. The desire to look within the hood was nearly irresistible, but at the last moment, Euryale had decided to leave the woman her anonymity. Nineteen statues from nineteen eras, each one completely lifelike, and each one unique. Euryale remembered the trembling being she had called to the circle, and could only imagine what toll the statues' creation had taken on Sthenno.

"Technically speaking, you're right, of course," Euryale said. "But Sthenno's so close to completing her part of the agreement. Have you ever considered that perhaps she's done all she can bring herself to do?"

"A gorgon with a conscience." The man grimaced as he shifted his bony old buttocks on the hard bench. "It's an interesting concept, Madam, but hardly relevant. The fact is that I have a contract, for twenty figures, to be delivered at the rate of one per hundred years, no later than the last midsummer's night of each century. If Sthenno complies, the island shall belong to your Goddess again. And, as I told you before, if she defaults, I shall sell it. It would make a lovely resort."

He stared at Euryale intently, trying, she supposed, to gauge her reaction to

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean



the prospect of the sacred island covered with condominiums and bathing-suited tourists. She yearned to simply let her hood fall back, so he could get a good look at the loathing she knew was inscribed on her face, but that would have served no purpose just now.

"We have another day until the solstice," Euryale said, as much to herself as to the old man.

He shrugged. "The century turns, Madam," he said. "The millennium turns."

Euryale's slender hands emerged from the sleeves of her cloak. They were encased in long, soft gloves topped with rings of opal and amethyst that had been passed from priestess to priestess, down from the time when the island had been a spiritual center, and the hills had vibrated with paeans in the old tongue. She struggled against clenching her fists, and succeeded in idly rubbing her hands together instead.

"Do you know Sthenno's story?" she asked.

"Of course," he replied. "She was one of three immortal sisters, born of the Earth and the Sea, who were priestesses to the Goddess Athena."

"The Greeks called her Athena," said Euryale, "though that was neither her first name, nor her last."

The old man ignored the interruption. "The youngest sister, Medusa, was seduced by Poseidon, and made the unfortunate mistake of fornicating with him within the confines of Athena's temple. When the Goddess discovered them, she punished the priestess, turning her from the most beautiful of women to the most abhorrent. And her sisters shared her fate," he concluded, "though I've never understood why."

Euryale had heard this particular distortion before, but it still ruffled her. Breathing deeply of the sea-scented air, she shook her head. "I've heard a different tale," she said. "Long ago, it was our sect's privilege to make the new king, and Medusa had won the honor. But she was arrogant, and substituted her own lover for the chosen of the Goddess."

"King-makers, indeed," the old man snorted. "Real kings create themselves."

"I only tell you how it used to be," Euryale replied softly. "Medusa's sisters were guilty of holding her welfare above their duty as priestesses. When the Goddess asked them if Medusa had willingly transgressed, they tried to shield her with half-truths and outright falsehoods. Three times the Goddess asked for the truth, and three times they lied. So she punished them all. They would never again be tempted by love-words to forget their vows."

"A harsh mistress," the old man said, "to treat lying and sacrilege in the same way."

Euryale laughed mirthlessly. "Oh, the Goddess differentiated," she said. "Medusa had, in fact, been led astray, and was not entirely responsible. When she begged for an end to her punishment, the Goddess took pity on her, and made her mortal; eventually, she was slain. But there was no such kindness for her sisters." Euryale raised her head, glad now that her face was concealed, for there were tears on her cheeks. "Can you imagine," she asked, "an infinity of turning anyone who looks into your eyes to stone? I think Sthenno refuses to meet her obligation because using her power just one more time will drive her mad."

For a long time there was no sound but the ever present crash of waves against the rocky beach, and the old

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

man's harsh breathing. When he cleared his throat to speak, Euryale hoped he was going to relent. But there was no more pity in his words than the Goddess had shown. "There's an old saying I'm sure you know. 'Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.'"

"Indeed," said Euryale. "But what of those they would merely discipline?"

He shrugged. "I'm sure, Madam, that you know the habits of the gods much more intimately than I. Now, I'd prefer not to waste any more time. To business, if you please." He went on without waiting for Euryale's nod of assent. "The fact is, I would prefer that Sthenno fulfill her contract, to selling the island. A connoisseur of oddities has offered me a great deal of money for the collection — the complete collection," he said. "She's a stickler for details, Madam. Nineteen figures will not do."

"And if nineteen is all you can have?"

"Then, I repeat," he said in clipped syllables that rang flatly in Euryale's head like the notes of a cheap, brass bell, "Sthenno is in default, and I will sell this island and everything on it to the highest bidder. Money is, after all, money."

"I see." Euryale rose and took a few steps before turning back to the old man. "And what of the danger to those who would come here? They could stumble upon Sthenno whether she wishes to be seen or not."

He smiled. "It wouldn't be my problem any longer."

The priestess suppressed a shudder. "Of course not." After a while she asked, "What if there were another way to get the last figure?"

He wrinkled his brow, and stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Well, it would have to be authentic. I suppose that you might know of other figures from another time tucked away here and there," he said, smiling slyly, "but they simply wouldn't do. The buyer has stipulated that the last figure must clearly represent the late twentieth century, just as the others are clearly of their own eras."

"Oh, it would be an authentic figure, and newly ... made."

He raised scraggly, gray eyebrows. "And just how do you propose to accomplish that, if Sthenno won't cooperate?"

Though he could not see her face, she struggled to put a smile in her voice. "You've forgotten the third sister."

* * *

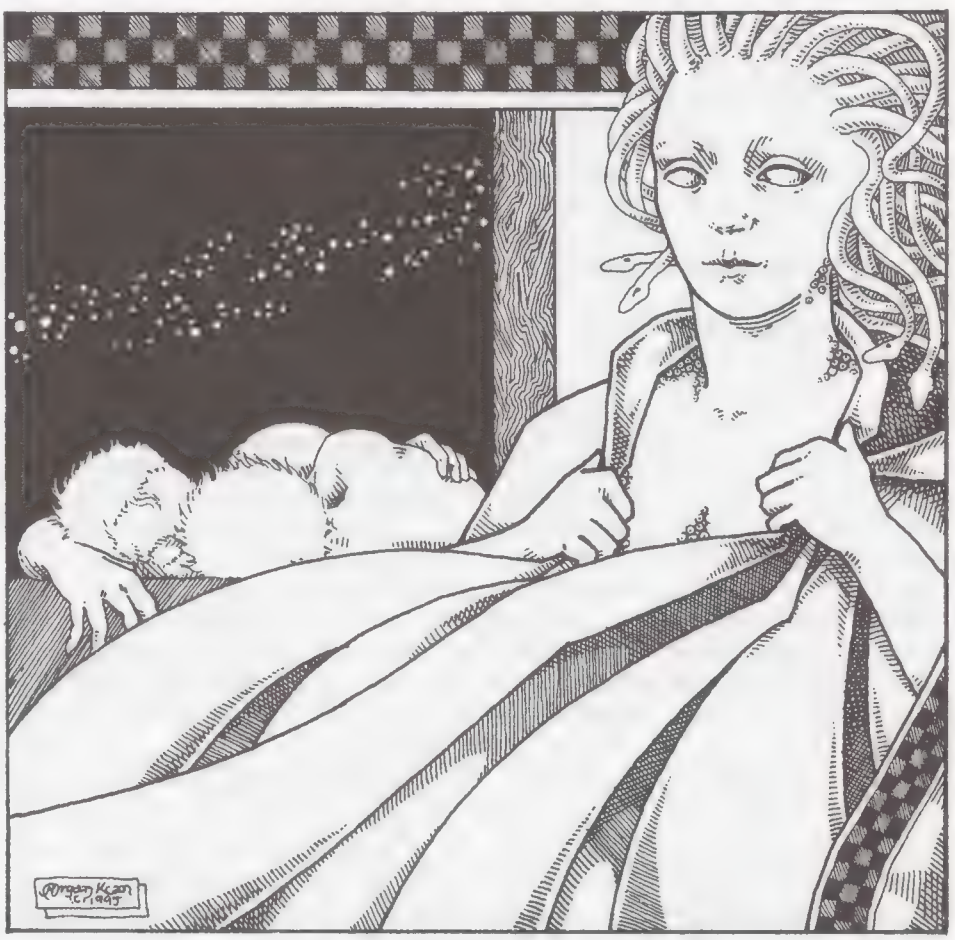
The lovers lay tangled in each other's arms, illuminated by a shaft of moonlight that spilled through the open window. They seemed very young to Euryale, and almost painfully beautiful. It was their hair, she supposed, cut short and spiky, that marked them as children of their epoch, and that had attracted the old man. She wondered just how he had managed to lure them here.

As she watched them sleep, she acknowledged a perverse desire to see the girl's delicately rounded chin and the boy's supple limbs preserved forever, their loveliness undiminished by time and disappointment. But then, in a gesture that Euryale found unbearably poignant, the girl stirred a little and brushed her fingertips along her lover's lips. With a sigh, the priestess reached into the folds of her cloak for a vial of hand-blown glass and carefully removed its silver stopper. First she held it just beneath the boy's nostrils, and then beneath the girl's, where the two could not help but inhale the heady fumes. In few moments, their breathing deepened, and they sank further into the safety of sleep.

Euryale replaced the stopper and put the bottle away. Then she read her contract with the old man a last time. The negotiations had taken most of the night, but in the end Euryale had gotten what she wanted. If the third sister fulfilled the agreement in Sthenno's stead before nightfall, the debt would be paid, and the island would revert to the Goddess and her priestesses.

Before she had come into the room where the lovers slept, unaware of what the old man had planned for them, Euryale had seen the contract written, signed and faxed to a lawyer in Athens. If all went well, Sthenno would soon be free; Euryale refused to have the old man's descendants hounding her for a debt no longer owed.

Euryale inhaled deeply, and began the chanting that would loose the power of the third sister. The tones came from her diaphragm, and with each rumbling vibration she became less Euryale and more an instrument of the Goddess, surrounded in an opalescent haze. When every molecule of her being



Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

hummed with the power she had invoked, she stopped and took one last look at the sweet faces on the pillows. Then she opened the door and called to the old man.

"Come and see."

He pushed past, hardly noticing her, his face wrought with expectancy. But as he looked down at the bed, his incipient awe turned first to puzzlement and then to anger.

"They're still alive!"

"Of course they are. I never promised theirs would be the final petrification."

The old man turned to shout something, but the words never left his open mouth.

Euryale stood before him cloaked no more, except in the power that the Goddess had inflicted upon her two hundred generations past — power that she had never used or even understood till now. The scales that covered her torso and limbs glimmered with more than moonlight; her wicked talons were extended; her eyes were inescapable green flames. She spread her wings to their full expanse and felt their strength, and the snakes that had once been long, silken tresses, coiled and writhed and hissed about her head.

As the old man changed, she felt a little piece of herself, long preserved, slip away and crumble to dust, but the sensation bothered her not at all. She took a last look at the lovers, still safely asleep, and at the old man whose whole being now matched his stony heart.

Euryale slipped through a tall window into the mild, midsummer dawn and winged her way to the beach. There, finally, she would find Sthenno, her sister, from whom she had been divided too long.

❄

Edwina Mayer says that she was certain, at age eight, that she would be a writer, but then somehow lost her way for three decades, ending up as an English teacher instead. But she has made up for lost time, garnering four sales in the last year. She lives in Champaign, Illinois, with her husband and two young daughters.

Margaret Organ-Kean works as a tech writer and systems analyst in addition to her artwork assignments from *Cricket*, *MZBFM*, and Wizards of the Coast (where she illustrated cards in the MAGIC deck, and was the artist and designer for all cards in The Great Dalmuti).

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Chastity

by Susan Jones

"You want a *what?*" I asked, confused.

"A chastity belt," the man repeated. "My priest requires me to make a pilgrimage to the temple in Charyel and I wish to ensure my wife's...loyalty until I return."

Unh-huh. Charyel. The birthplace of the Mordians' god-king. And, incidentally, best-known for its ladies of the evening, and catering to the needs of the flesh, rather than the spirit. And he thought his *wife's* "loyalty" was at stake. I wondered how much he paid his priest.

"You don't need me, you need a blacksmith," I told him.

"On the contrary," he replied. "You are exactly what I need. An ordinary chastity belt can be circumvented in many ways. Pliers, a lock pick, a hacksaw..." I could see he was speaking from experience.

After finishing his list, he turned back to me. "What I want from you is one that cannot be broken, cannot be removed, except by me."

"Oh," I said knowingly. "You want a *magic* chastity belt!" It was all I could do not to laugh in his face.

He completely missed my amusement. "Exactly! When can you have it done?"

I looked at him incredulously. He was actually *serious* about this. He really expected me to make a magic chastity belt!

When I first set up my practice in Eskan, I was prepared for some unusual requests. In Upkingdom it is a common joke that Eskanders are something other than normal. I just never expected anything quite like this.

But he was still waiting for an answer.

I wanted to say no. Aside from being ludicrous, it went against all of my moral principles. But money was tight, and I couldn't afford the bad publicity of turning away such a high-ranking official.

"I'll have to meet your wife," I said.

Two hours later, I was having tea in a well-appointed apartment above the city's main square. The lady who served me was small and attractive, with a meek demeanor, but a spirited smile. She was dressed in a long, flowing robe, decorated with jewels and feathers, as befitted a wife of her status.

"He's really a good man," she said, her clear-eyed gaze meeting mine above her teacup. "And I don't even mind about his mistresses." The flash of pain in her warm, brown eyes said she did. "But I really wish he would trust me! It doesn't matter how much I tell him or show him! He just won't believe that he's the only one I love!"

Her cheeks flushed with emotion, and her eyes flashed, daring me to disagree.

Artowk by Dameon Willich

"So you don't mind what your husband is proposing?" I asked, even though I knew what the answer would be.

He accosted me on my way out. "Well?" he asked, with an eloquently lifted eyebrow.

"I'll have to think about it," I answered him shortly. "See me in the morning."

By the next morning, although my eyes were heavy, I had found an answer and my conscience was at ease. Although it was not the course I would have chosen, I knew that my client's wife had made her own decision.

The man was waiting expectantly at my door when I opened the shop, and he had brought his wife in the hopes that I would agree.

Wordlessly, I brought them inside and seated them side by side. I had already begun the incantations as I began to gather the necessary articles. A small pewter bowl began to fill with herbs and oils and less familiar things. Just as the litany reached its highest pitch, I pricked each one's finger and added six drops of blood to the mix.

"Clef, Opaiyn, Lloch, Boend," I intoned, dipping my third finger and etching the symbols on each forehead. "You are the lock," I told her, "and he is the only key."

She smiled tremulously up at me, and he asked impatiently, "Is it done?" At my nod, he looked her up and down. "She doesn't look any different."

I assured him that my work was complete and irreversible, so he paid me and left.

The next day he came roaring into my shop, in a state of partial undress, with an unfamiliar and badly frightened girl in tow.

"What have you done to me? he bellowed.

I looked at him calmly, unfazed. "Your key doesn't fit any other locks," I said.

❄

Susan Jones is working on a degree in physics at the University of Alberta in Canada. She lives at home with her parents and "animals too numerous to mention," and tells us that her hobbies include reading.

Dameon Willich's drawings have appeared often in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*. When not doing artwork, he spends most of his time as director of the Seattle Knights Equestrian/Show Troupe.

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___ Issue #3 (Winter 1989) *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge.

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Humphrey's Dilemma

by Cynthia Mc Quillin

The dragon opened one sleepy eye and saw a tall, slender, human form silhouetted in the sullen glow of the immense hearth. The woman was standing about ten feet in front of him. He sighed and opened the other eye, making a valiant attempt to focus. From the look of annoyance on her delicate features, it was evident she'd been standing there for quite some time. Humphrey stretched, then rose ponderously from his bed of mangled gold, his maw gaping to display an impressive array of daggerlike teeth as he yawned. He glared balefully at the intruder, hoping this might persuade her to leave.

"Are you lost?" he inquired when she did not.

"No." She glanced around his cavern, shaking the dust from the hem of her wide silk skirts. "Don't you ever clean in here? Many people suffer from a severe allergic reaction to dust, you know. It certainly can't be healthy breathing this filth day in and day out."

"I have never had the slightest problem with allergies. Besides, why should I care about some silly human weakness?" His voice echoed through the vaulted chamber like distant thunder.

"Well, you might at least have some consideration for your guests."

"Dragons have never been noted for their hospitality."

"I suppose not." She bent over to dust off an iron-clad chest with her fine linen handkerchief. "Ugh!" Her rosebud mouth pursed in disgust as she dropped the filthy cloth on the floor and daintily kicked it away. She carefully inspected the lid of the chest before sitting down on it.

"Just exactly what is it you want?" The dragon preened his scales in irritation. They were the color of corroded copper, each one the size and shape of a laurel leaf. "If it's treasure..." his tone grew ominous.

"Actually," she said, "I was rather hoping you'd want to hold me hostage."

"Why, in the name of Dracon, would you want any such thing?"

"Because I'm sixteen years old and I don't want to end up a spinster like my sisters Esmeralda and Serena." She fixed him with a clear no-nonsense look in her deep blue eyes. "There are thirteen girls in our family, and with so many daughters, Father is having rather a difficult time finding suitors for all of us. He's a duke, by the way, Duke Edmund of Westerly."

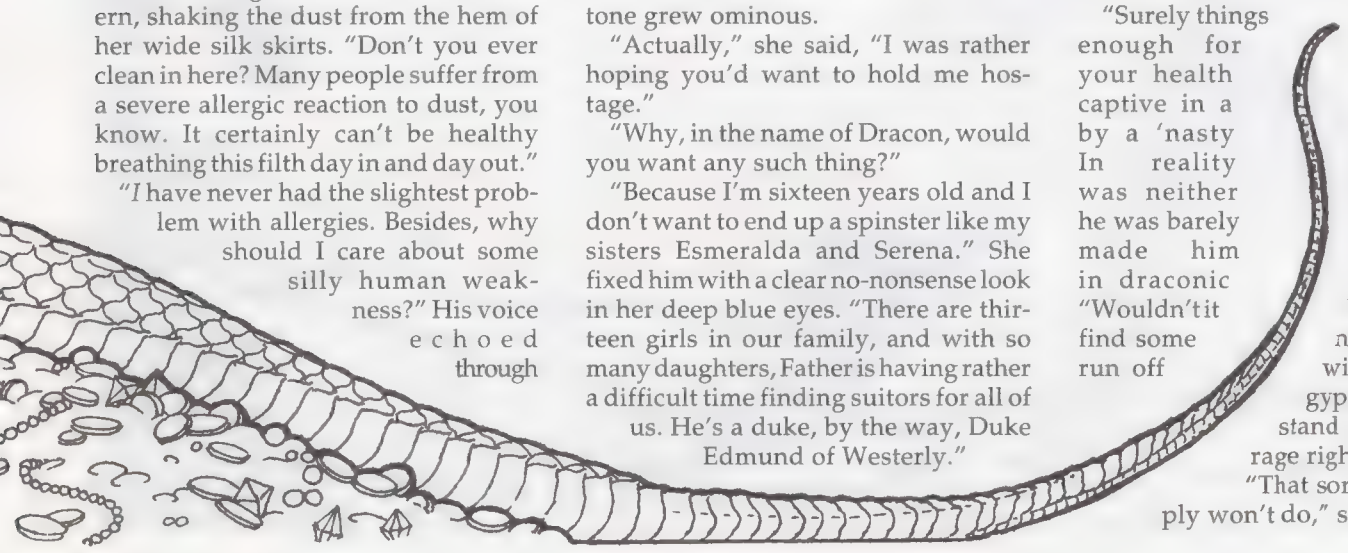
"Your father is a duke?" He looked slightly aghast. "Then you must be a maiden of noble birth."

"Well, of course I am. Are you dull-witted or what?"

Humphrey stared at the creature with a look of deepening dismay. His Uncle Horace had warned him about the daughters of noblemen, saying the pesky things were nothing but trouble and should be avoided at all costs. The dour old fussbudget had been forever quoting statistics which proved that maidens of the *blood royale* were the leading cause of death among dragons. A rational and basically passive creature, Humphrey could hardly slay her out of hand, but perhaps he could dissuade her.

"Surely things can't be bad enough for you to risk your health being held captive in a dusty cave by a 'nasty old dragon'." In reality Humphrey was neither nasty nor old; he was barely fifty, which made him quite youthful in draconic terms. "Wouldn't it be better to find some nice tinker to run off with, or maybe a gypsy lad? I understand they're all the rage right now."

"That sort of affair simply won't do," she said firmly,



Artwork by Alicia Austin

crossing her arms as she pursed her lips. It was a very unattractive expression. No wonder she was having trouble finding a husband. "I want a nobly born husband, someone who can offer me security and status, not some flighty commoner who'll have me running around the countryside in rags."

"What about enchanted princes, then? There's quite a nice frog pond nearby."

"I don't want some wimp who'll marry me out of gratitude. The knight who wins my hand must be a strong man, someone who's willing to fight for me, who'll sweep me off my feet!"

"Considering the strength of your personality, that's rather a tall order. *And*, may I ask, what makes you think I'd be foolish enough to endanger my precious hide for anyone, let alone some nobleman's daughter I don't even know?"

"What about treasure? Wouldn't you like to hold me for ransom? I'm sure that my father could raise quite a goodly sum for my release." One of the gossamer veils that fell gracefully from her cap fluttered about her face as the dragon drew a deep, exasperated breath. She brushed it aside with pale, slender fingers. Though her dress was well-made and of excellent material, it had obviously been made for someone shorter and altered to fit her. She wore no jewelry at all.

"My dear young woman, you've already admitted that you want to be rescued, not ransomed. Besides which, if your father could afford to ransom you, he could afford a dowry. And, even if he came up with the ransom, where would I put it?" She followed his glance around the chamber, which was already overflowing with plunder. "As you can see, Uncle Horace left me quite well provided for when he passed away. Quite frankly, my dear, I haven't worked a day since, and am not inclined to start. Why, I don't even hunt for food. The local village supplies me with fresh mutton and beef for a paltry sum of gold each month."

"What about travel, or company? Don't you get lonely cooped up in here all by yourself day after day?"

"When Martin, the Mayor's lad, drops by with my supplies, he fills me in on all the news. In fact, the young scamp is quite a gossip." Humphrey chuckled to himself remembering Martin's latest tidbit of local scandal. "Then there's Lally Thornwhistle, the witch who lives on the other side of the hill. She comes by for a cup of brew and a game of chess now and again, so I have all the worldly comforts and company I crave."

"Surely there must be something, some way we could strike a bargain?" Her forehead furrowed for a moment as she considered. "Oh bother!" she declared, jumping up to stamp her foot. "I hate to resort to feminine wiles, but you leave me no choice."

"Do your worst, maiden! I shall withstand you." Humphrey hunkered down with a determined air.

"As you wish." She lowered her lashes demurely and simpered, "Please help me, Sir Dragon, I'm nearly seventeen and I really don't want to be an old maid. Surely a big, strong, sensitive creature like you wouldn't want to see someone as proud and independent as me end her years a penniless spinster. I'd soon grow gaunt and haggard,

Artwork by Alicia Austin

haunting back-stairways and drafty tower rooms in castoff rags, broken and old before my time." She glided artfully to his side. The whisper of her stiff skirts across the floor reminded him of the sound a serpent's scales make as it slithers across a stone.

"Please, Lord Dragon," she cajoled, casually caressing his right eye ridge as she draped her arm over his neck. "You have so much — all of this lovely treasure, a spacious cavern, such strength and beauty. Surely, it wouldn't be too much trouble to do one little favor for me? And I'd be ever so grateful."

"Your gratitude means nothing to me, I'm afraid. And just a moment ago you quite thoroughly derided my housekeeping skills, and my manners."

"That was before I'd gotten to know you." She batted her lashes prettily, and smiled with astonishing sincerity.

"I see," Humphrey said. "You're only rude to strangers, then?"

"Oh, bother!" she snapped, straightening up to glare at him. "This sort of thing always works on the pages and heralds. If you had an ounce of kindness in that lump of coal you call a heart, you'd help me. But no, *you* can't be bothered. You're just like everyone else!"

Startled by her sudden temper, Humphrey reared up and said in a huffy tone, "Well, I never heard such nonsense in my life! This is *my* cavern. I don't have to sit here and be harangued by some lunatic human female! You really are stretching the limits of my patience, you know." It was his turn to glower, but instead of cowering she burst into tears.

"I... I... I'm sorry," she sobbed. "I don't know what came over me. Really you've been very nice, all things considered. It's just that I'm so desperate. I've been on the marriage block for three years now and the only person who has shown the slightest interest in me at all is that horrid Baron Orkley of Wythe. He's a short hulk of a balding oaf who's already killed four wives in childbed, and I know he has no feelings for me at all. He only hopes to better his status by marrying a Duke's daughter. But if I refuse his suit then I shall end up like my two older sisters, Serena and Esmeralda.

"If you could hear the way people talk about them behind their backs, and the pitying looks. That's the worst. And now, Father's talking about packing anyone who can't get herself married off to the convent because he can't afford to keep us all. I don't want to be a nun, but I just can't marry Orkley, I'd rather die!" she wailed. "Oh, what's the use? You may as well eat me now and put me out of my misery." She sank to her knees before him, dramatically raising her head and baring her throat.

"But I can't eat you," he blurted. Then he schooled his voice to a more conversational tone in an attempt to calm her. "Really, contrary to all the bad press we've gotten over the years, dragons don't eat maidens. We prefer nice plump sheep, they're a lot less trouble and they taste better."

"Good God! He won't eat me because I don't taste good!" She cast her eyes to heaven, then collapsed in front of the dragon to lie sobbing on the floor.

"There, there, my dear, you're going to make yourself ill," Humphrey said, moved in spite of his resolve. "Please do get up, you'll ruin that pretty dress." He carefully assisted her to her feet and helped her back to the chest she'd earlier dusted. "It can't be as bad as all that. Perhaps your father will declare war on another duchy. Then you could be married off as part of the settlement. Or some pirate prince might come raiding up the coast and carry you off as part of his booty. Think how exciting that would be."

"No," she sniffled miserably. "That simply won't do. I get seasick. Besides, I have my heart set on being rescued. Couldn't you pretend to hold me for ransom? You wouldn't have to fight very hard. Just hard enough to make him feel like he'd won fair and square, then you could run away."

Humphrey didn't like the 'running away' part much, since it made him look like a coward, but he really did feel sorry for her.

"Well..." His crest drooped just a little as he weakened. "I suppose that I might, just this once."

"Oh, thank you!" She hugged his scaly neck. "My name is Marilynn. I'm sorry I've been so awful. It's just that I was so desperate, but I'll be better now," she said, wiping her eyes on a voluminous puffed sleeve.

"My name is Humphrey," he said. "Come on now, there's a stream nearby where you can freshen up. You've gotten yourself all dusty and you'll feel better after a bath, I always do. Then, I suppose I'd better let someone know you've been abducted."

"Oh, you needn't bother. I've already taken care of that," she said as she stood up, once more completely self-possessed. "I hope you don't mind? But, I couldn't be sure you'd cooperate, so I wrote a ransom demand before I left."

"I see." Though he was somewhat chagrined at having been completely outmaneuvered by such a slip of a maiden, Humphrey reminded himself that she had won fair and square. "I suppose we just have to wait and see what happens then. After you bathe we can have some breakfast." He hoped she liked mutton.

Half a dozen pavilions had popped up in the valley below before the week was out. "The camp looks like some bloody great Fairy Ring!" Humphrey snorted. "All this fanfare and hoo-hoorah! And why, may I ask, are there so many of them? They're not planning to come up here and attack *en masse*, are they?"

"That would hardly be chivalrous!" Marilynn sniffed indignantly.

"What are they waiting for, then? In the old days, any self-respecting knight would just ride up to the cave, make his challenge and take his chances."

"Too many good men were killed that way," Marilynn said absently, smiling down at the encampment. "It's become common practice to hold competitions to determine which champion has the best chance of defeating the dragon, ogre or whatever. Really, it works out much better in the long run."

"Not for the dragon," Humphrey muttered. "Well, if you think I'm just going to sit around up here and wait till they pick the knight most likely to chop off my head, you are sadly mistaken, my girl."

"But you must at least pretend you're going to fight one of them or how can I be rescued?" Distracted from her plea by the arrival of yet another party of knights, her face suddenly paled. "Oh, no!"

"What is it, Marilynn? What's wrong?"

"It can't be," she gasped. "Baron Orkley was supposed to be in the upper marches chasing border raiders. He wasn't due back till midsummer. That's why I picked this month!"

"Calm down, Marilynn, there's no guarantee he'll win, after all."

"Oh, he'll win, by whatever slimy trick it takes," she said, looking thoroughly dejected. "After all, it's not only me he's after now, it's your gold."

"Don't despair just yet." Humphrey considered the alternatives for a moment then said, "All right, pick one. You've had several days to watch them, you must have a favorite by now. Say, that slight dark-haired lad you swoon over every time he takes a fall."

"You mean, Prince Kellen of Esmy? He does make a graceful showing in his light armor, don't you think, rather like a dancer."

"Excellent choice. Now, you wait here while I have a word with the young man. Maybe I can work it out so that everyone gets what they want."

It took only a little guile and patience on the dragon's part to catch the young knight when he was alone and away from the camp.

"Pardon me, good sir," Humphrey spoke from the shadows when Kellen had concluded his business, making his voice sound as small and human as possible.

"Who whispers in the shadows?" Kellen's hand went readily to the hilt of his sword.

"A friend."

"If you speak true, then show yourself." He drew the sword an inch from the scabbard to loosen it.

"I'll reveal myself when I have your word that you'll offer no attack unless provoked."

"On my honor, sir, I would never attack unprovoked."

"Very well, I would like to talk to you about the Duke's daughter." Emerging suddenly from the shadows, the dragon was an awesome sight, amber eyes glowing softly in the dusk.

"Indeed." The Prince's eyes grew wide. He swore under his breath and his hand tightened on the grip of his sword, but he made no threatening move. Unsure quite how to proceed, Humphrey nervously cleared his throat and then plunged into his proposal.

"It has come to my attention that Marilynn favors you above her other champions, and since I have grown rather fond of her, I thought it would be nice if you were to have her." He tried to sound as sincere as possible.

"That's all very nice, but it seems unlikely that I shall be chosen. I'm not much of a fighter, when it comes right down to it. I only came to try my luck in hopes that there wouldn't be much competition. Being the youngest son of King Margol of Esmy, I'm afraid I won't get much in the way of an inheritance to attract a wife. But the Duke has so many daughters, I thought they might not care so much about an inheritance if I could make a good showing on the field. Unfortunately the promise of your hoard has drawn every fighter in the region, and more arrive each day."

"I had noticed." The dragon lashed his tail in agitation, knocking over a small boulder.

"Sorry," he said when Kellen started. "Quite frankly, I have no intention of waiting for any more champions to arrive. I want this over and done with, so I have a proposal to make to you. I will make a personal challenge against you on the grounds of some long-standing family grudge. Then we'll stage a fight where you can appear to vanquish me, with Marilynn as a witness. I'll even throw in a reasonable share of my treasure for good measure. So, what do you say?"

"That would certainly be good of you, Lord Dragon, and very generous. But what do you have to gain from all of this?"

"*I* will regain my peace and quiet," Humphrey said. "This abduction was Marilynn's idea — not mine! And truth be told, I'm sick to death of all the commotion."

"As simple as that?"

"As simple as that," Humphrey assured him.

Kellen thought for a moment, then said, "I suppose I have nothing to lose. At least this way I have a chance to win myself a bride. I will await your summons." He saluted the dragon with a courtly flourish.

"Good. I'll call you out at noon tomorrow. Be sure to bring two strong horses to carry your bride-price." So saying, Humphrey disappeared up the slope.

Returning to the cave, the dragon cheerfully outlined his plan to Marilynn. "Tomorrow I'll call out your Prince and you'll be betrothed before the day is out. Now come help me move my hoard to a more secluded location."

More than willing to pitch in, now that her rescue was imminent, she chattered amiably about her family as they worked. It took them all evening and a good portion of the night to move everything to the spacious new cavern he'd discovered a few years earlier and had always meant to move into *someday*. They were both utterly exhausted when they returned from hauling the last load. Marilynn was too tired to eat, and sat weeping on her favorite chest.

"Here now, what are all these tears for? I thought you wanted to be rescued." The dragon bumped her shoulder gently with his nose.

"I do, Humphrey," she sniffled. "But you've been so good to me and I'm going to miss you."

"Well, I'll miss you too, but this is no life for a dragon." With a sigh, he laid his head down in her lap and let her stroke his nose. *The new place is going to seem awfully quiet and empty when she's gone*, he thought, glancing around his once cozy cavern. Humphrey had never realized how lonely he'd been after his Uncle Horace died, until Marilynn showed up. But after all, this really was no life for a maiden either.

As good as his word, the dragon appeared at noon the next day to demand that Kellen face him. "In keeping with the chivalric code of trial by combat I hereby challenge Kellen, Prince of Esmy, to stand in place of his grandfather Marcus, then Prince of Esmy, for the unjust slaughter of my Uncle Seamore, a peaceful dragon who dwelt near Lake Burga, in the western province of Esmy. It is my allegation that said foul deed was committed for no other reason than to steal Uncle Seamore's rightful hoard. I commend my suit in this matter to the judgment of God, as witnessed in fair combat on this, the third day of fourth moon in the year of the Leaping Fox."

"What say you, Prince Kellen?" the Duke demanded when Humphrey's challenge was heard.

"I have heard the tale told somewhat differently, Duke Edmund."

"So you refute the dragon's challenge. Good show, my boy! Then you must meet him in combat as honor demands." There was a general rumble of assent. "Come, Giles," he gestured to the master of the lists, "prepare Prince Kellen for battle. We shall await the outcome of your encounter eagerly."

"Good of you to warm up the dragon for me, Your Highness," Orkley sneered, as he brushed past. Kellen had never liked the brutish knight, but he refused to rise to his taunt.

But the Baron was not about to have his plans so easily upset, so while Kellen made ready to face the dragon, with all

the attendant pomp and ceremony that entailed, Orkley slipped unseen from the camp.

Arriving at the cavern well in advance of Prince Kellen, he skulked in the rocks nearby, determining what manner of attack would give him the best advantage. As he watched, he carefully prepared the large glittering net he had brought with him. The Baron had paid a goodly sum of money to have it spelled to hold a dragon.

Though Humphrey wasn't nearly as large as some of the monsters he'd faced in the past, he was still young and agile. Orkley finally decided that his best move was to back the dragon into the shallow depression in the cliff he'd noticed near the cave's mouth. Once backed into that hollow, Humphrey would have little room to maneuver and his one advantage would be lost. Having chosen his strategy, Orkley prepared to make his entrance.

"Oh! What's taking him so long?" Marilynn paced anxiously before the entrance to the dragon's lair.

"Patience, my dear," Humphrey said, for the tenth time. "These things take time."

Marilynn turned expectantly at the sound of a footstep behind her, but her expression quickly became one of alarm.

"Orkley!"

"Wait no longer for that prattling courtier, dear Marilynn," he sneered. "A real champion has come to your aid!" His armor, which was coated with dust from the long climb, seemed heavy and awkward compared to Kellen's silver scale, but the baron moved with strength and ease for all its weight. Net clutched in his left hand, he lifted a mace with the right and stepped menacingly towards the dragon.

Startled by this unforeseen turn of events, Humphrey slithered backwards to avoid Orkley's blow. He had never actually fought for anything in his life, and suddenly discovered that the idea of actually killing a man made him a little ill. He didn't even kill his own sheep!

"What, Lord Dragon, no more righteous blustering? No threats of vengeance?" Baron Orkley sneered as he closed on the retreating dragon.

Delighted to find that Humphrey was such a timid foe, the Baron thought to make quick work of him, driving the dragon steadily back into the hollow. All he need do now was to get the beast into a position where he could snare him in the net. But Humphrey sidled along the cliff face and crouched among the scraggly bushes. They were no real protection, but were, unfortunately for the Baron, tall enough to snag his net.

"Leave him alone, you brute!" Marilynn cried when she realized that Humphrey was trapped. She leaped to pull at the Baron's arm in an attempt to divert him. But he merely shoved the girl aside, knocking her to the ground in a flurry of fabric, loose blonde hair and veils.

"Marilynn!" Humphrey leaped to the attack when he saw her go down, fighting with more ferocity than he would have credited himself. Alarmed by his opponent's sudden fierceness, Orkley struck out blindly with his mace and cast the net, muttering the charm as he did. Though his blow never landed, Humphrey had leaped straight into the

Artwork by Alicia Austin

net. Caught by the spell as the web closed around him, the dragon fell dazed to the ground. But as the Baron confronted his helpless foe, Prince Kellen made his appearance.

"Stop!" Kellen cried, stepping from behind the rocky outcrop that hid the cavern's entrance from the path below.

Orkley turned at the sound of his voice, and began to laugh. "Who's going to make me?"

"Just let the dragon go," Kellen demanded, raising his sword and stepping forward.

"Sorry, but I can't do that, Your Highness," the Baron said. "He's worth too much money. The King of Bruskye has offered a royal ransom for a specimen of *Draconis Sapiens* to exhibit at the Royal Zoological Gardens in Treminsk."

"You, sir, have no honor," Marilynn snapped. Her cap had been knocked askew. She set it back into place with an angry gesture, then strode forward to stand beside her champion. "Go on, Your Highness, give him what he deserves." She gave the Prince a little shove, forcing him forward.

Not quite certain what to do next, Kellen lifted his chin in what he hoped was a noble expression, and assumed his most determined and menacing posture. But the boy was no match for Orkley, and the Baron very quickly disarmed him, driving the helpless Prince back into the pocket where he'd trapped Humphrey.

The dragon, who had been temporarily stunned by the power of the spell, was just regaining his senses. Seeing Kellen's predicament, he groggily shook his head and tried to rise, but to no avail.

"My God! Do I have to do everything myself?" Marilynn muttered, picking up a rock the size of a small cantaloupe and stalking angrily towards Orkley. He'd removed his helmet to get a better look at his captives, and was enjoying himself far too much terrorizing Kellen to notice what she was doing. But Humphrey saw her come up behind the Baron.

Alerted by the rustle of her skirts as she neared, Orkley turned just in time to see Marilynn raise the rock and bring it down on his head. Grunting in surprise, he reeled. Then he collapsed in a clatter of metal and stone, thankfully falling clear of both Kellen and Humphrey.

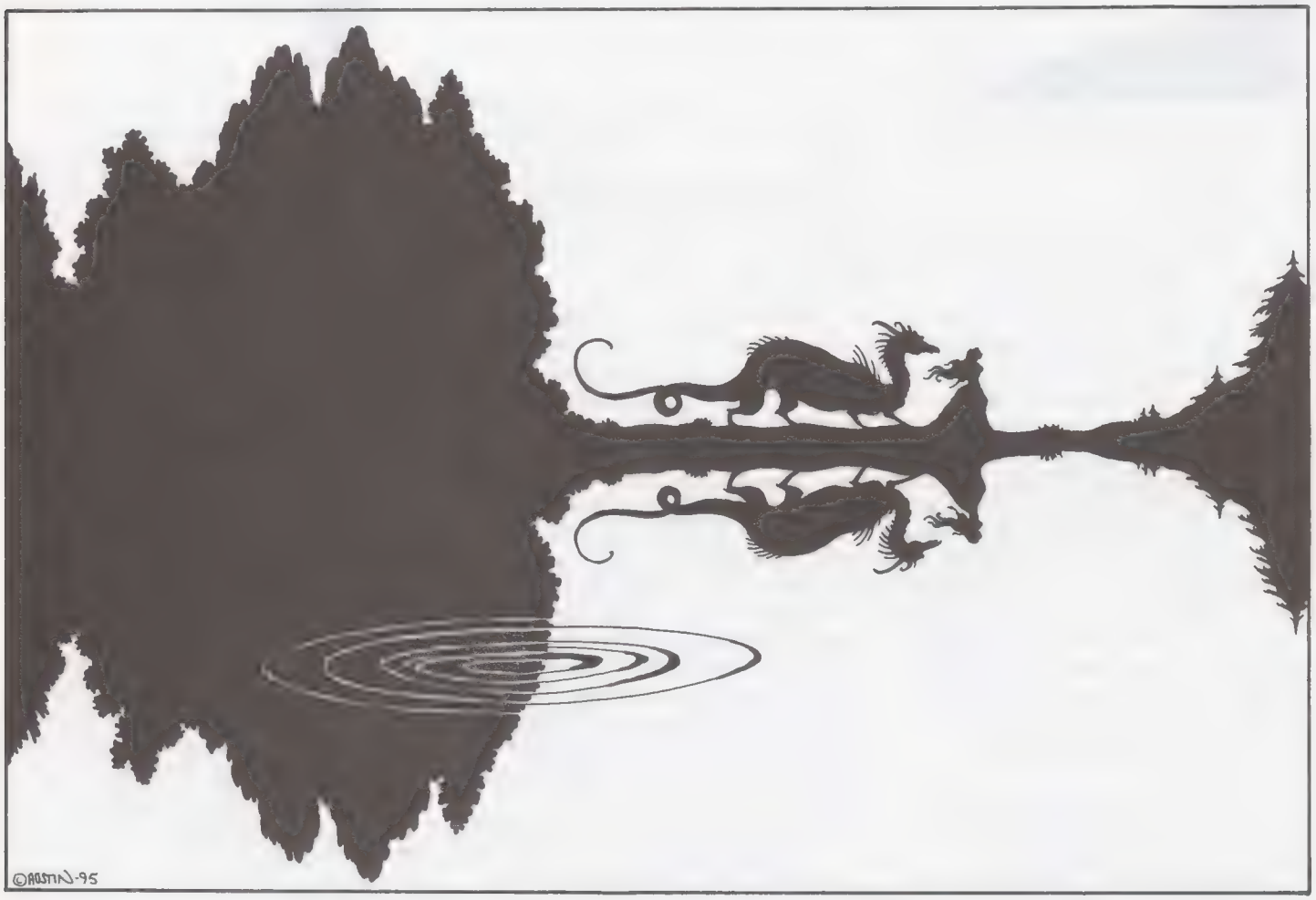
When Marilynn had helped Kellen to his feet and they'd freed the dragon, she tore one of her underskirts into strips, and braided them into lengths of crude rope which Kellen used to tie Orkley's hands and feet. Marilynn made one smaller strip into a gag, tightening it with a hard yank for good measure.

"Now what do we do?" Kellen wondered, surveying the baron's unconscious bulk.

"You're supposed to be the hero," Marilynn replied in a scathing tone. "Isn't it about time *you* thought of something?"

"Couldn't you just eat him?" Kellen looked hopefully at Humphrey. "He's not very well liked. I doubt anyone would even care if he just disappeared."

"I've already been through this with Marilynn," Humphrey said, a huffy note in his voice. "Dragons don't eat people! But why do anything with him at all? Why not just leave him like this?



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I'm sure someone will find him eventually, then let him explain how he got this way. Or better yet, lodge a formal complaint against him. After all, he came up here to cheat you out of your rightful trial by combat. That was hardly a chivalrous act."

"You're right, of course!" Kellen grinned.

"I do suggest you get your treasure loaded before someone down there starts wondering why it's so quiet up here. I don't particularly want to be around when the crowd arrives. Might make it harder to claim you drove me off and rescued Marilynn."

"As you say, Lord Dragon."

"Just one minute, Your Highness!" Humphrey and Kellen both turned to find Marilynn glaring at the Prince through a tangle of dusty blonde hair. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"Oh, yeah." He looked sheepish. "I guess the treasure really should be yours, since you're the one who rescued me."

"Damn straight!" she said.

"That's all right," Kellen said. "It won't matter once we're married. It'll all be mine then, anyway."

"And just what makes you think I'm going to marry you?"

"But, but..." Kellen sputtered.

"I don't understand," said Humphrey, cocking his head at a quizzical angle. "I thought that's what you wanted."

"So did I," she said with a little shrug. "But I realize now that it's not."

"Oh, fiddle! I'll never get a wife now," Kellen said, looking from the maiden to the dragon with a hapless expression.

"I suppose I could give him enough treasure to get himself a bride," Humphrey offered, looking to Marilynn for a decision.

"Oh, thank you, Fair Maiden," Kellen beamed, as she nodded.

"There's one stipulation," Marilynn said as he hurried to the horses and started loading the treasure. "You must make an offer for one of my two elder sisters, Esmeralda or Serena."

"As you say, dearest Marilynn. Either maiden would be quite suitable, I'm sure."

"What about you, Marilynn?" Humphrey asked, a look of genuine concern softening his amber gaze. "What will you do now?"

"Actually, I thought I'd sort of stick around." She grinned at him. "After all, you've got that huge new cavern to decorate. And you really do need someone to look after you, you know. But we're going to have to make a few changes..."

Wondering what he had done to deserve this, Humphrey turned his eyes towards heaven. But he was smiling as he followed Marilynn over the hill. ❄

CYNTHIA MC QUILLIN, who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, has sold stories to a wide variety of anthologies and — like most writers — is working on a couple of novels. She and her partner "Dr. Jane" Robinson perform as the musical comedy duet "Mid-Life Crisis". She also runs Unlikely Publications, a small recording and publishing company, and can be found at sf conventions selling her one-of-a-kind bead jewelry.

ALICIA AUSTIN's work is well-known and loved by sf and fantasy fans. She and her business partner, Jinx Beers, run Fantasies Unlimited, a studio which publishes Alicia's cards, limited-edition prints and other artwork. Alicia has been exploring Western and Native American themes lately, but for this story returns to the medieval-fantasy settings for which she is equally famous.

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"The Harder They Fall" by Tanya Huff**
- 2nd Place: **"Get With Child a Mandrake Root" by K. Kimberly Prosser & Lisa Swope**
- 3rd Place: **"The Family Tree" by Ron Collins**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Bob Eggleton for "The Harder They Fall"**
- 2nd Place: **Lisa and John Hunt for "Even More than Magic"**
- 3rd Place: **Vincent DiFate for "Get With Child..."**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64. Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at *FANTASY* Magazine.

Toll Keeper

by Devon Monk

Karlee felt stupid standing weaponless at the edge of the old troll bridge in full moonlight, but she wasn't afraid. She carried something even better than a sword — the town's ledger book.

"Excuse me?" Karlee called into the darkness. "Troll? Can we talk?"

"Ten farthings to cross my bridge or you'll be eaten alive like a suckling pig," a voice growled from under the bridge.

Karlee winced at the terrible poem. The meter was wrong and it didn't rhyme very well. "Actually, the whole town wants to cross the bridge, but none of us have any farthings."

That got the Troll's attention. A hulking form, twice as wide as Karlee and a good half again as tall, lumbered out from under the bridge. She wondered how something that big could fit under there. "What? No farthings? How can a town run out of farthings?" The troll swung one long arm around and scratched at its nether regions. Flies rose and fell at the disturbance.

"It was a slow process," Karlee said, moving upwind of the vaguely humanish beast. "Quite unintentional too, but trade has been bad, crops have been bad, and since we're cut off from the rest of the world except for the bridge, we've gone broke." She handed the troll the ledger book.

The troll squinted at it. "You've been in the red for months," it observed.

"And unless we can negotiate free passage over the bridge, we are all going to starve and die."

"So?"

"So a town full of skinny corpses won't curb your appetite for long, and there is nothing to attract other people over the bridge to our town. If we starve, you starve." Karlee snatched the ledger out of the troll's warty hand.

The troll picked its sizable nose with a pinkie nail. "True, but I don't eat people."

"What?"

"Never have — too many bones."

"But Dame Albright, and poor farmer Havas," Karlee sputtered, "we heard screams — we saw their bones. They were eaten!"

"Not by me. I'm strictly vegetarian."

"Who ate them?" Karlee demanded.

"The bridge."

Karlee turned and stared, wide-mouthed, at the bridge. In the shifting moonlight it seemed longer, more twisted — a snakelike menace that hunched, hungry, between the lands. "Then what have we been paying you for?"

The troll shrugged. "Distracting the bridge."

"Distracting it?"

"Well, it's not a very bright bridge," the troll said defensively. "I jump up and down, make a lot of racket, splash around in the river. The bridge pays more attention to me than to the people crossing it."

"We thought you were going to kill us," Karlee said, her voice rising. "We could have saved our money and built a new bridge!" She paced the riverbank, muttering to herself. "How am I going to explain this to the town council? I'm the Money Keeper, they trusted my advice." She whirled and glared at the troll. "I want our money back on the grounds of false advertising!"

"What false advertising?" the troll bellowed, spittle spraying in all directions. "I am a troll. I am horrible to look upon. I live under a bridge and demand money for crossing." The troll shrugged its massive shoulders. "So I don't eat meat. Big deal. Is it my fault you people read too many fairy tales?"

Karlee crossed her arms. Technically, the troll was right. It had never actually said it ate people. But there had to be some way to save the town.

"How about a loan?"

"You mean give up my money?" The troll shook its head, stirring up a cloud of bugs.

"No, I mean loan some of the money back so we can make a new bridge."

The troll snorted. "What do I get out of this?"

Karlee scrambled for an idea. What could the town give a creature they knew next to nothing about? "We'll make the bridge taller."

The troll snorted again, but Karlee plowed on. "That will give you a bigger home underneath. And if you grant us free crossings for a year, I'm sure our economy will soon be better than ever."

"Eight farthings a crossing," the troll said, its eyes narrow.

"Three," Karlee countered.

"Five and a low interest on the loan I give you."

"Four, the low interest and an additional year to pay off the loan."

"Done!" the troll exclaimed. "And if you don't keep up with the tolls, I'll be in town smashing houses before sunrise."

"Fine, as long as you act suitably ferocious when people from other towns pay to see a vegetarian troll."

The troll smiled, showing its yellow fangs. "For a modest percentage, of course."

"Of course." Karlee walked over and shook one of the troll's warty fingers. "Pleasure doing business with you, Troll."

"Pleasure was mine. Feel free to come by any time."

Karlee nodded. "Maybe I will." With that, she turned and made her way back up to the town, ledger book tucked neatly under her arm.

❄

Artwork by James Balkovek

Devon Monk lives in Salem, Oregon, with her husband and two sons. After spending seven years as an accounting clerk, she decided that words can be arranged more creatively (and legally) than numbers. When not writing, she can be found hiking, reading, playing her flute or chasing her kids.

James Balkovek is a native Californian and a graduate of California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. An illustrator of numerous childrens and educational books, he has over twenty years of illustration and design experience in commercial as well as editorial illustration. He runs BlackEagle productions, a graphic arts studio in central California with clients throughout the state.

While supplies last...back issues of the Darkover Newsletter are available for $2.00 each (Canada $2.75, other foreign $4.50). Issues remaining are #65 through #70.
Copies of the decidedly *non*-X-rated "Consenting Adults of Darkover" filk cassette* are $11.00; the matching songbook is $5.00. Checks for the newsletter or Consenting Adults must be in U.S. funds, payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley. Order from P.O. Box 72, Berkeley CA 94701.

*The name comes from MZB's oft-repeated comment that "filking should be done in private by consenting adults."

Witch Continuum?

by Roberta Gellis

The broomstick wobbled erratically over the garage, dipped drastically as it crossed the telephone and electric lines, and spun completely out of control as it passed the parked cars, dumping its rider inelegantly onto the oil-stained concrete. Sylvia disentangled herself from it and rubbed the sore spots.

"Wow!" she exclaimed. "That was some electric storm. It really loused up the degaussing on this stick. Is there a transportation thaumaturgist on duty?"

She became aware of the bulging eyes and gaping mouths of the two men. "Well, what's the matter with you?" she asked irritably. Didn't you ever have a broomstick fly in for repairs before?"

The younger man's round blue eyes bulged even farther, but he managed to get his mouth closed enough to gulp. "No ma'am," he whispered. "We never did."

"She wasn't really flying that thing," the older man said suddenly in a relieved voice. He ran a grease-grimed hand through tousled hair. "Some kind of joke. Sent off a catapult or something. Hey, lady, that kind of joke's dumb. You could'a been killed."

Sylvia did not reply immediately. Her eyes were fixed on the monstrous thing the men had been disemboweling, which she suddenly realized was not plastic but metal. The portion they were working on was meaningless to her, but there could be no doubt about the main body of the thing. Those were seats inside. People had been sitting inside a metal vehicle. She turned her head, her large brown eyes growing even larger as she took in the shop, other similar metal monsters, and the smell of petroleum products.

"No," she murmured automatically, "It wasn't a trick. I really was flying the broomstick."

Both men turned to stare at it, but it was a broomstick, the old-fashioned kind with the straws forming a rounded bunch rather than a flat fan. Incomprehensibly, a bicycle seat was attached somewhere around the middle with stirrups and a pair of saddlebags hanging down from it.

"Lady," the older man snapped, "we may be hicks from Hicksville, but we ain't idiots. There ain't no room for a rocket engine or any other kind of engine in there."

A cold terror gripped Sylvia so that her hands and forehead grew clammy wet while her mouth dried. It was only a crazy mathematical theory. Ninety percent of the faculty had laughed at old Einstein behind his back. Superimposed continua, he said, were possible in mathematics; therefore, superimposed continua were possible in reality.

Sylvia herself had been one of the scoffers. Zero was possible in mathematics too, she had pointed out, in a brilliant after-dinner riposte — after Einstein had left. But so far "nothing" had never been achieved in reality, neither absolute zero, nor absolute vacuum, nor.... The old man had heard about her remark, of course. Faculties had better communications systems than telepaths, specially when the news could make trouble for someone. But he had only shaken his finger at her and smiled his kindly, Kewpie-doll smile, and said she should read the papers before she made fun of them. So she had read them. In fact, she had been thinking so hard about the theory and its mathematical proof that she hadn't noticed that damned electrical storm that had gaussed-up her broomstick.

Her heart leapt. Of course, this was just an elaborate faculty practical joke to tease her about getting so hooked on Einstein's stuff. She drew a deep breath. It had to be that damned Roger Wayman. When she got hold of that court jester illusionist, she'd illusion him. She'd work a topological torus on him that would bend him like a pretzel! Now, how to get out of it? Damn Roger, his illusions were good.

"So," the older man growled, "if you flew it and want it repaired, show us the engine."

"It doesn't have an — a what you said." Sylvia had never heard the word before, except when the man said it, and she had not paid close enough attention, being somewhat distracted by her own thoughts, to repeat it. Would Roger know such a word? A recurrence

of her chill of terror made her shiver. "It flies by magic," Sylvia said, pushing fear away and concentrating instead on whether she should use Logic or Perturbation Theory to break the spell.

The younger man's eyes popped so that, for a moment Sylvia wondered if they would fall out, but the older one made a grimace of disgust. "Lady, we're busy. Go pull someone else's leg. Joe, get that air conditioner off so we've got some room in there to work."

"But Harry —" Joe began.

"Hey, Mac," a pleasant baritone called.

A fortyish man, his hair an untidy mass of salt and pepper curls atop a lean face, his neat white shirt and hands smeared with dirt, walked toward them from the road. Sylvia stared at him, feeling cold again. For an illusion, this was very complex. Even Roger couldn't hold together everything — sight, sound, touch, smell. Perhaps she was doing it herself. Most illusionists counted on that. People saw, smelled, felt, and heard what they expected once the initial scene was set. She had neither Calcedonium nor Sinerip, and she couldn't think of a spell for breaking illusions. After all, that wasn't her field at all. Resolutely, Sylvia closed her eyes and began to attempt to solve the general Schrödinger equation for molecular structure.

It was impossible to solve this equation, even with the best mentalist calculators hooked in a trance. If there had been a solution, you could change lead into gold without magic, just by applying energy. Well, it was "possible" in the same sense that the superimposed continua of Einstein were "possible". Oh, no! If she started to think of that, she'd reinforce the illusion. Sylvia pushed away the sound of the men's voices and began to state the terms of the equation aloud to reinforce her concentration.

"Harry!" Joe shrieked, "she's saying a spell."

Sylvia's eyes snapped open. "I was not!" she exclaimed, indignant at the thought that she could be accused of bespelling intelligent creatures. "I was reciting the opening terms of the Schrödinger equation. And you needn't worry. I'm not going to change any of your filthy old iron to anything else. We're geniuses at the University," she added sarcastically, "but we haven't solved the Schrödinger equation for anything beyond hydrogen yet."

"But the second term of that form of Schrödinger is the Dirac constant squared over two em times the derivative squared psi over the derivative of ex squared," the new man remarked in surprise. He glanced quickly at Sylvia's short black tunic and long red tights, at her oval, dark-eyed, dark-haired face,

and shook his head. "Sorry, for a minute you looked familiar, like a very promising student who didn't stay the course. She decided physics was no place for a woman."

"What has being a woman got to do with physics?" Sylvia asked in a stunned voice, and then added, "Oh, damn! I'm getting caught up in it. I'm adding my own bits. Roger wouldn't know the first term or any other term of the Schrödinger equation from a cantrip for running a street cleaner."

Then, frowning, Sylvia reached out and grasped the newcomer's arm. As her fingers bit into the solid flesh, she turned white as a specter. "Oh, God," she whispered, "It's real. I'm no illusionist. I could add a hallucination, but I couldn't make it tactile."

"Are you all right, miss?" the man asked.

Sylvia wet her dry lips. "Physically, as soon as my heart stops trying to climb into my mouth, I'll be fine. I'm just frightened. Look, you spoke as if you were familiar with the Schrödinger equation. Are you also familiar with Einstein's theory of superimposed continua?"

"Einstein's what?"

Fighting down panic, Sylvia asked, "Do you know of Einstein?"

"Of course. He was one of the greatest mathematicians in the world. His theory of relativity —"

"Was?" Sylvia breathed. "Do you mean he's dead here?"

"He's been dead for nearly fifty years! What do you mean — here?"

"Look," Sylvia pleaded, "don't rush off and call your mind readers or exorcists. Really, I'm not mad or possessed. Something very odd and rather frightening has happened. I —"

"Mister," Harry interrupted, "do you want us to tow in your car? It's the carburetor, and we can't fix that on the road."

"Yes, yes. Tow it in and get it running," the man replied, but his eyes never left Sylvia's face. "Now, what were you saying, miss?"

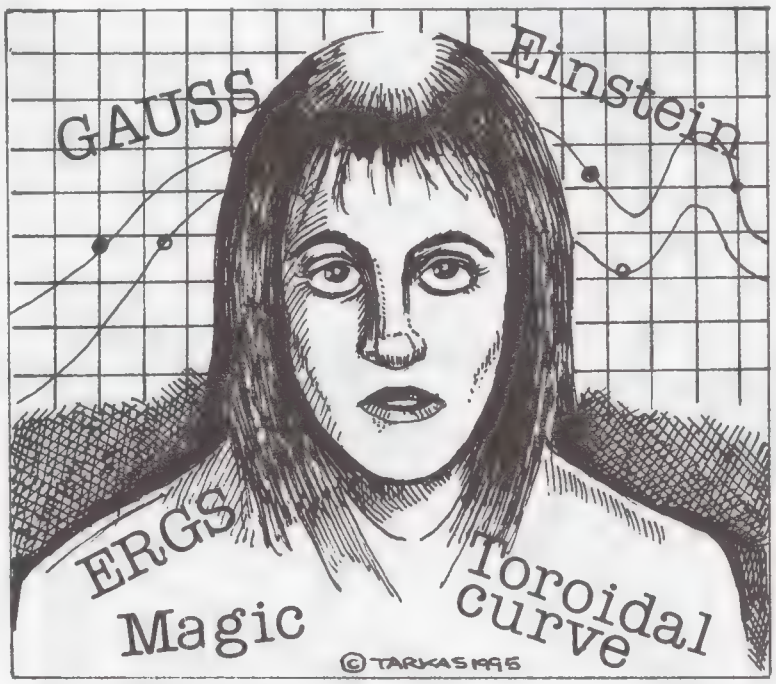
"My name is Sylvia Fine."

"How do you do, Ms. Fine?"

The formal reply drew a tiny, semi-hysterical giggle from Sylvia. "Not too well," she answered wryly, and then, as she noticed his frown. "Sorry, I'm a little upset."

"That's all right. I'm George Pitkin. Can I be of any help?"

Sylvia had fought off her panic and her brain was working again. Terror and despair might be around the corner, but she was no defeatist. This man had spoken of students and knew a form of the Schrödinger equation. The probability, then, was that he taught some form of science at a university. If she could convince him of the truth of what had happened to her, perhaps the university would have the facilities to open a way back into her own time and space.



"I hope so," she replied steadily, then turned to the younger mechanic, who was still gaping and watching her suspiciously. "Joe, how did I get here?"

"Riding that broomstick!" Joe exclaimed, pointing a finger at it.

"Now look here!" George said.

Sylvia interrupted him. "Joe is telling the truth. I — somehow, I've broken through my own time/space continuum into yours. Wait, maybe I can give you partial proof. If we take my broomstick over into that field—away from the cold iron and the... those strings that go from pole to pole and make my skin itch — maybe I can make it do something. It won't work right because this whole world is all gaussed up and full of cold iron." Sylvia shuddered slightly. "But maybe it will work enough to make you listen to me."

George looked at Joe, who said, "I'm telling you, mister, she was flying on it."

Sylvia could see George thinking that it was probably a put-up job between them, but then he shrugged. "Okay, I have to wait till the car's fixed anyhow. What can I lose? I doubt one little girl could do me any harm in an open field."

This time it was Sylvia who gaped. There must be something awfully queer about the women in this space/time, she thought. In her own world, one little girl (or boy for that matter) might well be able to turn you inside out or call a salamander that would fry you in your own fat. However, she was certainly not going to suggest such ideas to this George Pitkin. She wanted his help.

He walked over and reached for the broomstick, which promptly leapt into the air, dealt him a sharp rap on the hand, and began to emit a piercing whistle.

"AMECH!" Sylvia commanded sharply. The broomstick subsided immediately, and she ran over to George. "I'm so sorry. I thought it was completely gaussed up and out of action, so I didn't turn off the burglar alarm."

"How —" George began, but he was interrupted.

"Witch!" Joe screamed. "She's a real witch."

"I'm not a very good one," Sylvia soothed. "I'm a mathematician. Anyway, I didn't do that. The stick is prechanted. I just turn it on and off and tell it where to go. Just like you do with that thing," she added, pointing to the car.

George Pitkin had been in the field of physics for a long time. He had seen what was "impossible" yesterday turn into the common technology of today. Modern physicists had gotten to the point where they took the White Queen's advice seriously — they believed seven impossible things before breakfast each day. George swallowed hard.

"Okay, Ms. Fine. Let's go out into

that field — only you take the broomstick this time. Calm down, Joe, I'm taking her away."

"Be careful, mister," Joe warned. "Don't go with her. She'll turn you into a frog."

"No I won't," Sylvia assured him. "First of all, in this gaussed-up atmosphere I don't think I could, although usually I'm quite good at transformations—and secondly, it would be very rude."

The experiments in the field could not be called a total success in the sense that the broomstick behaved very erratically. Nonetheless, they convinced George Pitkin that Sylvia was not playing tricks with wires. If she were using electricity, magnetism, or miniaturized engine components, she was performing a miracle just as surely as if the broomstick was really responding to magic. In any case the best place to investigate was at the university. George himself was convinced. The continuum thing might be nonsense, but the broomstick was worth investigating. Still, George couldn't think of any way to get his colleagues out into a farm field to do it, and there seemed to be no other way. When the car had been repaired he induced a shuddering Sylvia to enter it, but when they arrived at the university, the broomstick wouldn't even quiver.

"Damn it," George said, "can't you at least turn the burglar alarm back on, even if you can't make that thing fly?"

"Don't be a fool," Sylvia spat. "This whole misbegotten building is constructed of cold iron. You know magic can't work in a magnetic field! Why if Albertus Magnus hadn't discovered that it was the earth's magnetic field that made spells weak and erratic and Gauss hadn't found a way to *de*gauss things, we'd be in the same smelly, disgusting situation you are. Isn't there a single spot in this whole space/time that's free of magnetism?"

George looked at her as if she had just handed him the biggest philosopher's stone in the world. "So that's what you mean by gaussed up. I thought it was just a ladylike way of saying... er... saying something else."

Sylvia shook her head disgustedly. "Right now my emotions are too violent to be relieved by bad language." She sighed. "I'm not a very good witch, but out on the lawn I might —"

"No, no, we have just what the doctor ordered," George said, smiling broadly. "We have a completely antimagnetic chamber. I can easily call a meeting there for a scientific demonstration." The meeting could not be called that day, of course. Faculty members have busy schedules of teaching and research, and they have private lives, too. After studying the department calendar, talking to people, and balancing Sylvia's eagerness against the free periods of the men he wanted to impress, a time slot two days away was found. Having discovered that the money in Sylvia's wallet was not legal tender in the United States of his time/space, George bought her a roast beef sandwich for lunch before he rushed off to class.

For the first time in several hours Sylvia had a chance to think without pressure. She did not waste it wondering what she would do if it were impossible to get back. After all, she would have a whole lifetime to find out in that case. What was real and important was that Einstein's theory was correct. Superimposed continua did exist; it was even possible to travel between them, which Einstein had not suggested. But Sylvia knew she would get no better reaction in her own time/space than George would get in this one if she made such a claim. Evidence would be necessary.

Sylvia consumed her sandwich and coffee, looking reproachfully at the meal after the first bite and sip. She was briefly tempted to try a transformation spell and get filet mignon and champagne, but with all this iron if the spell should backfire.... The last thing she needed was a miniature cow running around the desk.

What kind of evidence? A scholar's mind runs in scholarly patterns. Books containing the scientific history of this time/space and, perhaps, one or two small motorized devices should give strong enough evidence to merit investigation — just as her broomstick did here. Sylvia flushed with excitement. She could start a whole new field of science. They could seek ways of controlling the movement between continua, possibly find unpopulated continua that would solve overcrowding, and continua where no life of any kind ever developed to mine for resources. That would mean some pretty powerful air or nonbreathing spells, but... No, Sylvia checked herself, no daydreaming about what *could* happen. She drew a blank sheet of paper from the top of George's desk and began to note down what she would need to take back.

A daydream of such power, however, is a recurrent draw. A few moments later, Sylvia was scribbling Einstein's equations and visualizing a great simplification of their toroidal curves. She had been saying one aloud when she rode into an electrical storm. Her lips twisted in a wry grimace. It was a bad habit for a witch to talk to herself; it could produce some weird effects, as it surely had in this case.

Sylvia put the thoughts aside, reminding herself that only the future could determine whether she should feel regret or triumph, and concentrated on the equations. If lightning had struck her weather shield... Sylvia substituted ergs for one set of unknowns. That produced a rigid factor. The new distorted curves, also greatly simplified, sprang into Sylvia's mind. But if one curve was distorted and the others were not... Would they touch? Would a weak spot be generated? Sylvia pressed the heels of her hands to her eyes. The true curves were too complex; she was incapable of drawing or visualizing them. And the simplified ones were wildly inaccurate. What she needed was an automatic writer hooked into a calculating mentalist outfit. Perhaps this time/space had some horrible mechanical equivalent. She explained her need to George as well as she could when he returned.

"You want to use the mainframe or even the supercomputer," he said with ready understanding, after a glance at her equations. "I don't know. Supercomputer time is pretty expensive. And your problem isn't exactly approved by the department."

For a long moment Sylvia was silent, studying her fingertips. Without knowing what the parameters were, the equations she had been working on were merely mathematical exercises to George. Probably he guessed that they were relevant to her attempt to regain her own time/space and possibly, given enough time, he could figure out the meanings of the symbols. Sylvia had not intended to explain or leave her equations behind. She was not at all eager for the members of any continuum other than her own to be aware of the possibility of controlled travel between the time/space zones. However, if she could not get supercomputer time, Sylvia was pretty sure she would

not get back.

Doubtless the equations and applied electrical force in a degaussed area would open a path — but to where and when? Possibly there was some force of affinity that would draw her to her own time and place, but very possibly there was not. Sylvia was eager to get home and quite courageous enough to take a calculated risk, but she loved life too much and was too good a mathematician to take a blind, unreasoned chance deliberately. It would be bad enough to find herself in another nonhome continuum, but what if she reappeared in an airless and lifeless time/space? If the computer was anything nearly as good as a calculating mentalist, values might be obtained for some parameters that would optimize her chances.

"Let us assume for the sake of argument," Sylvia began in formal mathematical style, "that everything I have said and will say is experimentally accurate — or as accurate as fallible senses can be." She continued, defining terms and expanding operators until, suddenly, George sat down hard and stared at her. He had obviously reached the same conclusions Sylvia had. He bit his lips, staring through her now.

George had computer time scheduled, time he had argued and pleaded for, grudgingly allowed to solve a pet problem of his own. He would certainly get a nice paper out of the answer the computer would provide, but it wouldn't set the world on fire. Whereas this.... Visions of ranking with Planck and Hertz and Einstein danced in his head. They would be the Pitkin equations, the basis of a whole new physics — after all, Einstein was dead in this continuum. But if this was some cruel trick.... George did have one real enemy at the school — or, at least, Philip Ransom would give a good deal to see him look like a fool and fall out of running for department chairman.

George stood up, his mouth set mulishly. He was at a dead end in his life anyway. One more minor paper would add little luster to an existence so mediocre that his wife had left him out of sheer boredom. But this... if it came off....

"When can you have that stuff ready for programming? Tomorrow?"

Sylvia nodded. She didn't know what programming was, but the key word was "ready."

"Is there anything I can get that will help you?" George asked eagerly.

"How can I know?" Sylvia replied. "I don't know what you have."

"Right. Stay here and work until I get back. I'm going across to arrange computer time for tomorrow. Then we can go to the library. If you describe what you need to me, I'll see if I can find it for you in our terms."

By the time the scheduled faculty meeting was due, Sylvia and George were as ready as they would ever be. The supercomputer had hummed softly over Sylvia's equations. Far too often the eager eyes that scanned the printouts had found UNCOMPUTABLE ERROR or INSUFFICIENT DATA, but some solutions and partial solutions had been determined — enough to convince Sylvia that further calculation without experimental confirmation was useless. Sylvia might have hesitated about being the experimental animal, except for one thing; there were, indeed, factors that indicated the matter of each continuum was at a "ground state" or lowest energy value in its own continuum. Thus, even if the fabric of several continua were weakened, the tendency would be for Sylvia to return most easily to her own.

Nonetheless, she was scared enough to shake until she entered the antimagnetic chamber. Once there, the vague uneasiness that coursed through her blood, the feeling that the air was too thick, was stifling her, disappeared. She listened while George presented the theory and equations with a sensation of euphoric conviction that was not shaken at all by the objections raised. When questions were addressed to her, she answered pleasantly, even

when the questions were openly sarcastic. She did notice that a particularly venomous attack, which raised snickers and made George flush, was being waged by a grossly fat man called Ransom. However, insulated by the relief given her by protection against magnetic currents and cold iron, Sylvia merely thought idly of the spell that would turn Dr. Ransom into a frog. He already looked a lot like one.

George completed his presentation. Before he had time to announce his demonstration, Dr. Ransom rose. "Yes, very nice," he said smiling broadly. "Any hypothesis can be proven mathematically if unreal solutions are acceptable. Unfortunately, Dr. Pitkin, this is a real world — excuse me — continuum, and physics must still cling to real solutions so we need a little, unimportant thing like experimental data."

The barb missed its point this time. In fact, Dr. Ransom had been helpful in introducing the demonstration. George nodded from behind the podium and Sylvia rose from her seat on a chair beside it. "Yes," George said, smiling even more broadly than Ransom and mimicking his tone in the first sign beyond his flush that hinted at his temper and his tension. "You are so right, Dr. Ransom. If you will give Ms. Fine time to get to the center of the room, we will get on with our practical demonstration. Sylvia."

Sylvia lifted her broomstick from beside her chair and removed the cloth that had covered it. There was an absolute stunned silence as she moved to the center of the room, saying clearly, "TERLY, ERLY, BALTAZARD, IRLY, MELCHIOR, GASPARD. AVANTI!"

Hissed exclamations of outrage cut off into a second stunned silence as the broom rose, moved around to align itself with Sylvia so that she could easily mount the bicycle seat. She set her feet in the stirrups and said, "HAUT." The broom rose. "POINT." It hung patiently in the air, supporting her steadily between floor and ceiling. "Ready," Sylvia said to George, who began to move the lever of a rheostat attached to a heavy cable.

A faint tingle passed through Sylvia's body and her euphoria began to fade. Fear dried her mouth and shrank her voice to little more than a whisper as she began to recite the equations. Seeking calm, help of any sort, she fixed her mind's eye on Dr. Einstein's kindly face. She could see George's eyes following the equations on the sheet he held.

"...CHI EX SQUARED PSI..." Sylvia's voice trembled on to the completion of the equations and George slammed the lever home. A bolt of electricity leapt from an electrode in the ceiling down toward Sylvia.

Dr. Ransom forcibly pushed away the chair beside which he was standing and started toward Sylvia. "Disgusting!" he bellowed. "What kind of childish trick —"

Sylvia stared at him. Tears overflowed her eyes. It hadn't worked! And that fat gob coming toward her, mouthing inanities. Rage rushed into to replace — to ward off — utter despair.

"USOR, DILAPIDATORE, TENTATORE, SOIGNATORE, DEVORATORE, CONCITORE, ET SEDUCTORE," Sylvia shrieked at the top of her lungs, pointing at the fat, ranting idiot. "OH ORIAS! OH ZEPAR! FAIX RANSOM GRENOUILLE."

Lightning leapt again. Blue nimbi aureoled every head. The paper in George's hand crackled and flashed sparks. An enormous, incredible caricature of a bullfrog's burping filled the room. Magic! Sylvia suddenly remembered that she had just chanted her weather shields up when transfer occurred. An extra factor. She began the Einstein equations again. A thunderclap accompanied the next bolt of lightning, drowning screams of terror. Sylvia was whirled away.

She landed, inelegantly, right in the middle of the High Table in the middle of dinner. To be precise, she landed right on Dr. Einstein's soup plate. She landed laughing consumedly, for the last thing her eyes had rested on was Dr. Ransom in the form of a man-sized, spotted frog. And the spell would last at least a week or ten days, even in that gaussed-up atmosphere. Let him explain that childish trick!

"My dear," Dr. Einstein said mildly, wiping soup off his lapel, "Wherever did you appear from? And why in my soup?"

"Oh, dear Dr. Einstein," Sylvia exclaimed, laughing and crying at the same time and extracting books, an electric shaver, and a toy steam-powered generator from her saddlebags. "I've just proved your theory! I've been in another continuum, and I've brought back these things. And here are the equations based on yours that I used to get back. And — and there are worlds and worlds and worlds! And I'm going to find out how to move between them. And —"

Sylvia looked around the table at the bug-eyed faces. Everyone looked either stunned or furious, except Dr. Einstein, who was studying the papers she had thrust into his hands and nodding. As she watched she saw the expressions changing, greed and calculation taking the place of shock and anger on many faces, and she had time to regret deeply having fixed her mind on Dr. Einstein before she was translocated. Perhaps if she had thought of her own study she would have appeared there; or if only she had had sense enough to keep her big mouth shut about proving the theory and pretended she had been teleported illegally.... It would have been worth the punishment for "indecent usage of magic" to keep the multicontinua universe secret. Then she and Dr. Einstein could have worked on translocation quietly. Now....

The old man looked up, his eyes twinkling. "You have a very bad memory, my dear. These are nothing like my equations, but I will be delighted to do all I can to help you. Hmmm. Hmmm. This opens up a whole new aspect of the theory. Won't you get off the table, Sylvia? Sit down beside me and have something to eat. Then right after dinner we can get to work."

❄

Roberta Gellis brings to this story her varied educational and working background — Master's degrees in biochemistry and medieval literature; and years as a research chemist, free-lance editor of scientific manuscripts, and writer of many meticulously-researched historical novels. She lives on Long Island with her husband and a very lively Lakeland terrier called Taffy. She has one child, Mark, who has just completed his Ph.D. in Rhetoric) at Purdue University.

Gellis has been the recipient of many awards, including the Gold Medal Porgy for historical novels, and the Golden Certificate and Golden Pen from Affaire de Coeur.

Randy Hoar (better known in fandom as "Tarkas")lives near Seattle. After a stint in the Air Force in the 60s, he played in a band and didn't make art his profession till 1979, even though he did psychedelic posters way back when (and has been drawing since he was four).

An Interview with Tanya Huff

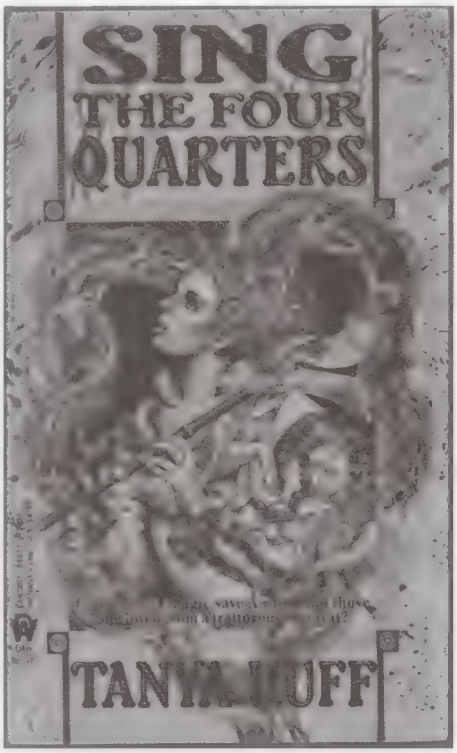
by Stephanie D. Shaver

Via the *FANTASY Magazine* phone line and a tape recorder that shall remain nameless, I ambushed Tanya Huff at home and interviewed her. I was pleased to meet the cheerful, humorous lady whose novels I have been following since I was a freshman in high school.

Huff's latest novel, **FIFTH QUARTER**, is currently out from DAW books. She has written both contemporary and high fantasy, and all her novels are entertaining, stimulating reads that are filled with good characters, fast action, and solid storylines.

STEPHANIE SHAVER: *When did you first get involved with writing?*

TANYA HUFF: Well, I always wrote. I started my first book in grade eight called **KAREN'S SUPREME SUMMER**, and I think I wrote eight pages. In spite of that, it never actually occurred to me that people wrote books, and it certainly never occurred to me that it was a career. Then, when I got to high school, I met Karen Lahey and she was doing Zenna Henderson pastiches. Suddenly it hit me — if someone is actually writing these things, someone must be making a living off of it.



But it was still always going to be a hobby because, in my family, the arts are not considered a career choice — I was a teamster once and they were thrilled. So I wrote little hundred-and-twenty-page books, hand-written ones with illustrations, all through high school, and when I went to university I went into forestry. After a year of that, I decided it wasn't really what I wanted to do.

I ended up getting a bachelors of fine arts in radio and television under the theory that, if you're going to write, you might as well write for the people who have the money. The year I graduated, the CBC laid off 750 people, and I never actually *worked* in my field.

So originally you didn't go in writing fiction, you went in writing non-fiction for television programs?

No, actually, Canadian radio does a fair bit of drama. So you can study to write fiction for electronic media. But, like I said, I never did it. My first book however, **CHILD OF THE GROVE**, was a third year university creative writing project.

What subjects do you like to write the most about?

You know that old saying, "If I'm not going out with the girl I love, I'll love the girl I'm with"? Well, I'm pretty much like that with my writing. Whatever subject I am working on at the moment is the one I am really interested in doing, and I'm just not interested in writing anything else at that particular point in time.

There are differences between writing the contemporary and the heroic. In the heroic you need to make up the profanity, which is a real pain because as soon as you say something as basic as, "Dammit!", you have to then create an entire

theology to support it. So a number of things are a little easier when doing the contemporary because you don't have to do all the world-building. On the other hand, the world-building can sometimes be the most fun bits of writing fantasy. It's a six of one, half-a-dozen of the other thing.

When did you first get involved with writing science fiction and fantasy?

Right from the beginning. Well ... if we knock off **KAREN'S SUPREME SUMMER**. My first book was **CHILD OF THE GROVE**.

I was a fan before I started writing. I worked in the dealers' room — my ex published a magazine, a Canadian magazine called *Miriad* — and I did costuming and won a couple of regional costuming awards.

And you have lived in Canada all your life?

Yes.

And you went to the Midwest for conventions?

Well, you can go to a convention in the Midwest in the summer every weekend. You could probably go to three all summer in Canada. The problem is that we have twenty-seven million people over a landmass larger than the continental United States... you have twenty-seven million people in the Los Angeles area. It's a difference in numbers. So, if you wanted to be active in fandom, and you were Canadian, you pretty much had to cross the border.

How did you get involved in fandom?

My ex. Originally I stopped into a Toronto science fiction bookstore and there was a poster for a convention. I hadn't heard, really, very much about fandom. I didn't realize fandom, *per se*, existed. So I went to this convention and met someone who was quite involved, who was in fact running that particular convention, and went along with him for eight years.

Is there any reason why you choose fantasy over science fiction?

Well, I could write space opera, but for anything more scientific than that, I just don't have the background. I might be able to fake biology, but there's so much going on in the hard sciences right now that I wouldn't understand the explanation if I did the research. There's a good reason why engineers and chemists write hard science fiction... it takes years to understand the basics. And it's changing so *fast* right now.

At some point I'd like to try space opera, because the science is not so hard in that. You still have to be plausible, but you have to maintain that same kind of structural integrity writing fantasy. There are always rules you have to follow whether they're rules you made up or rules the universe came up with.

A lot of your novels tend to deal with musicians and music in general. Are you yourself a musician?

I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. [laughter] I always felt that if the ubiquitous genie ever showed up and gave me three wishes I'd wish for music. I was in the church choir for years because in church they *have* to let you sing in public no matter how bad you are. I love music; I'm particularly fond of simplistic vocals, but I'm not very good with complicated stuff. As I have absolutely no musical ability whatsoever, I assume that the reason music keeps showing up is pure wishful thinking on my part.

You wrote a series of novels dealing with a PI and a vampire. Did you do any research on police work before writing them?

Oh, yeah. Big time. I have a whole rack of books written about police officers which give me only a psychological perspective because all the rules are different in Canada. Fortunately, I have a friend who's a member of the auxiliary police force in Toronto. Anything I needed to know, she found out. And anything she *couldn't* tell me, I just called the police.

People are remarkably helpful in their specialty when you ask them something. Even when it's a really stupid question — like, "Can you tell me what make of car you drive?" The constable on the other end of the phone didn't know but he sent someone out to look. (It was a Ford, by the way.)

So do you research a lot of your novels?

I research all of them. I probably do a month of research before I start writing, and then I research perpetually while I write. Very often the research forms the novel. You get this germ of what you want to do and then, as you research, the novel begins to take shape on things you find out. For example, for the book **SING THE FOUR QUARTERS**, while one would assume there wouldn't be a lot I could research — besides the encyclopedia of music — what I was actually doing was reading and taking notes out of **PRIVATE LIVES THROUGH THE AGES**, and you begin to get a feel for the world you want to create.

Rumor had it that the Victory Nelson novels were going to be turned into a TV series or a movie. Is that just a rumor, or...?

Well, no, it was optioned and they paid me money for it, but the option ran out in August and they didn't re-up. Hopefully it will be optioned again.

You tend not to stick to one world or one set of characters for too long, do you have any plans to return to any characters you've written about previously?

I am currently writing another Vicki Nelson book.

Cool!

You wouldn't say that if you had been stuck on chapter three, page eight as long as I have been. [laughter]

Any chance you'll be returning to any of the others?

There is a possibility — if I can sell the idea — of a sequel to **GATE OF DARKNESS, CIRCLE OF LIGHT**.

Oh, wonderful. That's a great book.

I enjoyed it a lot, too, and I always felt that if I died after writing that book I could die happy because I felt like I'd actually said something in that book. However, it also had the weakest sales of all of my books. So ... it is more difficult to get a sequel sold to a weak book, as opposed to a strong one. It's back out again, which is one of the strongest points about DAW books. They support their backlist and they support their authors, which is vitally important to genre publishing.

What projects are you currently working on?

Well I'm currently working on the fifth Vicki Nelson book, which is titled **BLOOD DEBT** and set in Vancouver, British Columbia. That's about it. I only ever work on one thing at a time. I'm very single-minded; I get up, I do one thing from beginning to end until it's finished, and then I start something new.

And do you try to make all your books stand-alones?

I try to make it so that if you have to read the second book without having read the first book first you can understand what's going on. The Vicki Nelson books — although the emotional and character development progressed through the four books — you could pick up the last book first and still get the story that was in that book. The only time where I have ever set it up so that you had *really* better read them in order are with my two latest from DAW. You'd better read

FIFTH QUARTER — which just came out this August — before **NO QUARTER**, which will be out this spring, because they are very definitely One and Two. I suppose you *could* read **NO QUARTER** first, but you'd be pretty lost.

What is your fondest work to date?

Oh, heck. Hard to say. I'm still terribly fond of **GATE OF DARKNESS, CIRCLE OF LIGHT**. But I'm not one of those people who can't go back and reread their work. I can re-read **CHILD OF THE GROVE**, and I wrote *that* in University, and say, "Ooh, that was clever!"

It's kinda like asking someone who your favorite child is. You would never want to admit there was a favorite, even if there possibly was one. I was very *satisfied* when I finished **GATE OF DARKNESS**, and I felt that I really *said* something in that. I really put something of myself in that book. But that was my third book, and I think in a number of ways that was the book where I learned to put myself in it, because from that point on I have managed to open up in all of them. Which is not to say that the first two books I'm not in, but it really *clicked* in the third one.

It was a "learning experience".

Mm-hm. Every book should be better than the one before it.

Do you have any plans to collaborate with anyone in the future?

Oh, God, no. I have such intense control issues, I could never possibly collaborate with anyone. One or both of us wouldn't survive the experience, and it certainly wouldn't be anything worth reading. I have gotten better with editors ... with my very first book — you should talk to Sheila Gilbert sometime about the little fits I threw sometimes about her moving my commas... Now, I just assume if she moved them, she's right.

Who are some of your earlier influences?

Andre Norton, Robert Heinlein, particularly his short work. Robert Heinlein's short stories were like jewels, there isn't a single wasted word. I love Andre Norton because she is so accessible to everybody. You can give a nine year old an Andre Norton book and not worry about them being exposed to gratuitous sex or violence, you can give an adult an Andre Norton book and realize that they will be intellectually stimulated. I loved Andre Norton. For a while there I went through and read everything she wrote. And there was one short story by Orson Scott Card — it's been collected in **MAPS IN A MIRROR** — of which I have forgotten vast amounts of the story, but what I remember was that, when you tell the truth, people notice. And that had a huge emotional effect on my writing. Just the gem out of that story, that when you actually tell the truth people notice.

That it makes a difference?

It *does* make a difference. You must be true to what you believe. It doesn't necessarily have to be small "t" truth, but it *must* be capital "t" Truth.

So do you believe in incorporating a strong sense of truth in your works or life in general?

Well, pretty much what I think I mean by this is that you have to be honest with your reader and you have to be honest with yourself. The emotions you put in have to be there because they honestly belong there, not because you are trying to manipulate a response.

Who are some of your earlier heroes?

Early heroes... my grandmother. My grandmother raised four children in the Depression by herself, and she divorced her husband because he was fooling around. And this was back in a time when women just *did not* do that. And ... lemme see, who else... I was mostly busy, I never had a lot of time for early heroes. I was a big Star Trek fan, if you can call Captain Kirk an early hero... or an early crush.

How did you finally achieve the full time writing status?

I moved out to the middle of nowhere where costs are minimal. When I lived in Toronto, I worked full time and wrote pretty much as much as I'm writing now, but Toronto is horrifically expensive. Where I'm living now the cost of living is very low, life's necessities are very small; you don't need the best and

the brightest. I have enough clothing from when I worked that I'll probably never have to buy a new article of clothing again for as long as I live. I will. I mean, there's only so long you can wear 75 old t-shirts before you get really depressed, but mostly I just moved to the country, where I could afford it.

Tanya Huff's novels include:

THE NOVELS OF CRYSTAL
CHILD OF THE GROVE
THE LAST WIZARD

GATE OF DARKNESS,
CIRCLE OF LIGHT

THE FIRE'S STONE

SING THE FOUR QUARTERS
FIFTH QUARTER
NO QUARTER *

VICTORY NELSON
BLOOD PRICE
BLOOD TRAIL
BLOOD LINES
BLOOD PACT
BLOOD DEBT *

SCHOLAR OF DECAY, a
Ravensloft book**

* Forthcoming from DAW Books
** Forthcoming from TSR Books

Do you still go to conventions?

I never have the time to go to conventions. I go to Gaylaxicon every year ... I went there first as a Guest of Honor, and had such a wonderful time I've been back every year that they've had it since. Other than that, I go to conventions if I'm a guest. I am going to Halifax this November, a Niagara Falls, Ontario, convention in March, and Winnipeg to KeyCon in May. And [I went] to Glasgow for WorldCon, but that was mostly so I could go to Scotland.

I am about to ask something that I don't know if you mind me asking, so if there are subjects you don't want me to ask about...

Yes, I am.

Oh! That's not what I was going to ask, but if you don't mind that's fine.

No, no, don't worry about it.

Oh, good. Is there any reason why you put homosexual characters in your novels?

Well, actually, it doesn't have anything to do with the fact that I'm a lesbian, it's mostly because...if we're looking at a statistical average of one in ten, it is just bad world building *not* to have them there. And, also, oh, I dunno. You write what you know. Now, I personally tend to believe that you've got your ten percent of the population who are *strictly* homosexual, you have ten percent of the population who are *strictly* heterosexual, and everybody else is bisexual, but they are culturally trained to be heterosexual at this point in time. That is a personal belief, by the way, with absolutely no statistical background, but that's how I tend to write. More importantly, in creating characters, certain traits become very obvious. I hate to say something like, "the characters tell me who they are" because that sounds so twee but, to a certain extent, they do.

I also tend to believe that it is the writer's obligation — well, it's everybody's obligation — to leave this world a better place when you leave it than when you got here. So that's why you'll find in my books that the good guys always win, and evil never comes out on top, because if that is the only example I have to leave — that good can win — then that is the example I want to leave.

Circling back to your question, we could make it as simple as the fact that homosexuals exist and therefore should not be excluded.

Any interest in art?

I read "Elfquest" for a while, but I read that mostly for the quality of the writing, although I like Wendy Pini's art. My ex was into collecting comic books for their art, so I got some exposure to that from him. At one point I had all the John Byrne "X-Men", which I sold for vast sums of money. I like whoever is doing the animation for ***The Adventures of Batman and Robin***. I didn't like it at first but after a while it really grows on you. Lately, I've become a big fan of cartoons — mostly because I can't get to comics anymore.

Do you watch The Animaniacs*?*

Yes! I was at a big convention in the spring and there were six of us sitting around this fairly ritzy hotel dinner and someone brought up *The Animaniacs* and three of us sang the theme song. The other three people at the table suggested we had too much spare time.

Any advice you'd like to give to new writers?

Keep writing. And listen to advice when you're given it. The biggest problem with new writers is that they give up too easily. They get a rejection slip and they feel like they're being personally attacked. The only thing that's being rejected is that story, you're not having your whole life rejected for God's sake. So, develop a thick skin and keep writing and remember that just because one person doesn't like it doesn't mean the next one won't. But ... I'll tell you something, if an editor takes the time to sit down and actually write to you and tell you what they think about your book, you should *listen*. Because time to these people is money, and if they take that time, you should respect it. They wouldn't do it if they didn't think there was something in there worth salvaging. And too many people, I think, only see the rejection, and not the actual encouragement they're getting.

I always figured Isaac Asimov's three rules of writing were very good, which are: Read. Read more. Don't give up your day job. Heinlein's three were, I think: Finish everything you start. Send everything you finish. And keep sending it out until it sells.

Keep writing and sending it out. Listen to what people tell you but develop a thick skin. Because if you get depressed by your first rejection slip, your first bad review is going to *kill* you. I mean ... sure there's a certain inescapable amount of depression, but you should make it one of those "don't get mad, get even" sort of things. The best revenge is a Hugo.

Wonderful advice. Thank you, Tanya Huff. ❄

Artwork by Allison Fiona Hershey

The Cats of Time

by William A. Sell

Myotark and Kyaldee, in Kaptaka's home shall be."

The words of the chant sounded flat in the small, stuffy room. The queen wrinkled her nose. She didn't like the smell of the place. And she had little confidence. Kaptaka certainly was an old witch and it sounded like she was using old and out of date spells as well. No modern witch she knew used cauldrons anymore. An old witch, probably inept — and incredibly ugly. The queen shifted impatiently in the small, cramped chair. She was accustomed to more spacious furniture. But here with Kaptaka there were few comforts. A rude hut, rough furniture. The fire was making it much too warm! An old fashioned dwelling for an old

fashioned witch. Why had she come here? Well, she knew the answer to that. It was quite simple. She had tried the other witches and they hadn't been able to help. Kaptaka was supposed to be different. Looking at her, the old witch's hat — the tall, conical type — the black dress and the cape. The long nose. No respectable witch looked or dressed like that anymore. Yes, she definitely was — different. They even said she still rode a broom and had a cat as a familiar. All passé. The other witches said Kaptaka was addled. An old witch past her prime.

Now she was making some kind of ancient incantation, tossing ingredients into the great black kettle. Not very pleasant-looking ingredients, either. The queen twisted her gold ring, studded with flashing diamonds and rubies. The gesture was one of both impatience and nervousness. This was another wild goose chase. She thought about the entourage outside; the guards, retainers, the carriage. It was time to return. She'd give the old woman a few coins. Old women, old witches. They were all the same. Age. Time. It made her feel uncomfortable as she thought about herself. The years had fallen heavily upon her; beauty had faded. No. Not faded. Disappeared. Only a few magic spells kept up the illusion. She had paid dearly for them. But they could only go so far and last so long. Lately the illusions had become even less complete. Kaptaka was her last chance. Last? The word appeared to be quite true. Last. No more.

She smiled and said, with a tone that was both weary and sardonic, "Good Kaptaka, I think this has gone far enough." 'Good Kaptaka'? It was still wise to be polite when addressing a witch.

The old woman paused. Her hunched shoulders were so close to her head that it was almost impossible to tell where one began and the other ended. Her back was arched giving her body a permanent stooped position. She turned her witch's face toward her customer.

"Ah, Majesty!" The voice rattled like wind through dead trees. "These things take time."

Yes, the Queen thought. Time. That is what I do not have. She gave Kaptaka a sharp look. A witch. An old fashioned one. Ugly; broomsticks, a cat.

"A cat," she said without thinking. "You really have a cat?"

The witch shrugged. "I do. I suppose it is a bit out of fashion. I have a familiar."

In spite of herself the Queen became interested. This witch was so unusual.

"Why?" she asked.

"Why?" Kaptaka shrugged again and tossed 'something' else into the cauldron. "Because cats have a kind of immortality."

Immortality? The queen pricked up her ears, the interest increased. Immortality. Age. Not growing old. Those were the things she sought.

"You know why I am here?"

"Of course." Kaptaka smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. There were many teeth missing in the gap of her mouth. She even had a wart, the Queen realized, right at the tip of her nose.

"Beauty, your Majesty." She moved closer to the Queen. So short, the Queen thought. Were old witches always so short? But then, she hadn't seen many old ones. She preferred the young, high-fashioned, beautiful ones. They were more to her style. But, she had to admit, none of them had really been able to do much. Temporary measures. She needed more than that. Witches. How many? She had lost count. She was down to the bottom, down to the dregs. Kaptaka. The name brought only amusement to the other witches. Amusement and a certain amount of tolerance. After all, she was a very old witch. Muddled, they said. But once she was quite good — in her youth. Anyway .... The Queen sighed. She was here. In this rough hut. It was the last place and the last chance. Otherwise she would grow old like everyone else. Old and ugly. Perhaps like Kaptaka. She shuddered at the thought. There were so many young men ....

"Beauty," Kaptaka said again. "Beauty and age. You want the former, but not the latter."

"Naturally," the Queen said firmly. "That is why I am here." She paused. "What is this 'Kyaldee and Myotark' business?"

"Myotark and Kyaldee," Kaptaka corrected. "They must have their names said in that order."

"They? But what are — 'they'?"

"Cats. I have summoned them for you — at least I am trying." She moved back to the cauldron.

"Why?" The Queen leaned forward. The cauldron was bubbling and Kaptaka threw more ingredients into the kettle. She was about to begin the chant again when she paused, as if now remembering the Queen's question.

"Why? Because they are Cats of Time. Isn't that what you wish? Time?"

"Well, yes." The Queen hesitated. "Time and —"

"Time and beauty." Kaptaka nodded. "My Queen, they go hand in hand. The flower buds and blooms, flourishes and then — it fades. Beauty is gone. Time has done that."

Yes, the Queen thought, thinking of herself. Time had done that. She leaned back in the chair and gave the witch one of her most regal looks. Her tone matched.

"And these — cats — can make a difference — in me?"

Kaptaka nodded. "I would not summon them if they could not. Summon —" She put her long fingered hand to the sharp pointed chin, fingers that looked almost like claws. There was a wart there, also, the Queen noted. And some hairs sprouting from it. Kaptaka stroked the chin thoughtfully. "They seem — very reluctant —"

It was all nonsense, the Queen decided. There were no cats. At least no cats of time — and the only time here was the time that was being wasted. She was about to say so when Kaptaka spoke again.

"Ah! I had forgotten!" She hurried to a cupboard and rummaged around, returning with a small, dusty green bottle. "This should do it!" she cried, pulling the stopper and sprinkling some of the contents into the cauldron. "The whiskers of a mouse!" Again the chant:

"Myotark and Kyaldee in Kaptaka's home shall be!" Nothing. Then something. The kettle began to seethe, not a mere boil but a violent turbulence gripped the contents, the kettle itself shook and a dark cloud of steam rose and flowed into the room. The Queen, startled and a bit frightened, shrank back in the chair. She was about to call for her retainers when something happened that fascinated her. The cloud was taking form; she thought she saw misty outlines, shapes? The cloud drifted over the hearth and settled there. The outlines grew sharper, more defined. Then the cloud was gone. In its place were two cats.

"Cats!" The Queen uttered the word, staring first at the animals and then at Kaptaka.

"Not just 'cats', Majesty — but Myotark and Kyaldee. They are the

Artwork by Allison Fiona Hershey

Cats of Time. A very special breed."

They looked like very ordinary cats to the Queen, but their arrival was not ordinary. Wait. Not so ordinary in looks after all. She leaned forward, squinting, as if to better study them. They were especially beautiful animals. One, so black, so dark, it seemed to have collected all the darkness of night. The other so white that it seemed to blaze with the brilliance of the sun. They sat on their haunches, looking calmly at the Queen with their great yellow eyes.

"They can —" The Queen's voice was almost breathless. "— these two are the ones — ?"

"Yes, Majesty." Kaptaka gave a slight bow. "They can reverse the time that has touched you. The time that has robbed you of both your youth and your beauty." There was no smile on her face as she looked at the cats. "Myotark will give you back your youth and Kyaldee, your beauty."

"Then let us get on with it!" The Queen's voice rose, her face flushed with excitement.

Kaptaka held up her hand. "Of course. It will be done. But it must be done in a certain way. There are formalities."

"Formalities? You mean payment? I can assure you that there is a chest of gold in my carriage —"

"Forgive me, your Majesty, you misunderstand. I would never doubt your word, never doubt that you would not honor our bargain." She turned to the cats, a crooked smile on her face. She addressed them. "I am honored that you have come. Do you understand the wishes of the Queen?"

The cats nodded. Both. In unison. The Queen felt a shiver of excitement running up her spine. Truly, they were not ordinary cats!

Kaptaka turned back to her customer. She hesitated before she spoke. "The formalities I mentioned. There are certain things that must be done." She paused. "Things you must do."

"Things? What things?" The Queen began to feel uncomfortable.

"You must drink of the brew."

The Queen half rose from her chair. "You mean — that repulsive stuff in the kettle? Never!"

Kaptaka produced a small ladle, dipping it into the now simmering cauldron. She put the ladle to her own lips and took a sip of the contents. "It is not poison, Majesty."

"I — did not mean to imply — but, it has —"

"Many ingredients. Yes. And for the spell to work you must take a sip as I have. It really doesn't taste as bad as it looks."

"I will not!" the Queen said stubbornly, a touch of anger in her words. Who was this — old witch — to tell her to drink of that hideous substance?

"How important is your quest?" Kaptaka asked calmly, placing the ladle on a small table by the hearth.

"I would not be here if it were not important!" the Queen answered stiffly. "But — you must find another way!"

Kaptaka spread her hands. "There is no other way. All magic spells work only if they are followed precisely. A sip of the brew is a requirement of this spell." A pause. "It would be a shame to forsake your dream for one moment of slight unpleasantness."

"I shall not become — ill?" the Queen asked, her voice hesitant. She was looking at the cats. But in her heart and mind she saw a mirror. A mirror of herself as she had been.

"You shall not become ill, I promise."

"And — that is all?"

"Not quite. The cats must come to you and sit on your lap as you sip the brew."

"Come to me?"

"Yes. You must ask them. Of your own free will. Ask them to come and grant your wish. They can only act if this is a true and sincere wish."

"I have no doubt that my wish is sincere, you can be sure of that!" The Queen seemed relieved. "And —" she

looked at the kettle, "— just a very small sip?"

"A very small one, Majesty."

"Agreed!"

"Call them, then."

"Cats," she began, but Kaptaka interrupted.

"By their names. They will only come if you call them by their names."

The Queen nodded and began again. "Myotark and Kyaldee, come to me. Make me what I wish to be!"

The cats came. Slowly, on their padded feet. With an almost floating motion they jumped and alighted on the Queen's lap.

"Why," she said, "they feel as light as air!"

Kaptaka approached with the ladle of brew.

"Just — a sip," the Queen reminded her.

"Just a sip, Majesty."

The Queen closed her eyes as the ladle touched her lips. A tilt, a sip. The eyes opened.

"Why —" she smiled, surprised, "— it wasn't bad at all!" Then her eyes closed again, her head drooped. She slept.

The cats stood on their hind legs, placing their front paws on the Queen's bosom. With that kneading motion of cats, they pressed themselves against her until the paws disappeared into the being of the Queen. Then the legs, the heads, the bodies, followed by the haunches. Only two tails remained, one black as night and one bright as the Sun. The tails twitched for a moment and then they, too, were gone. Kaptaka nodded her satisfaction.

"It is done," she said.

The Queen's eyes fluttered, opened; the head came back to its upright position.

"At last, Kaptaka," the Queen said, a touch of impatience in her tone. "We work well together, but you are late." There was a long sigh. "It is good to have the human form again."

"And a beautiful form, I may add. The Queen is young and beautiful, just as promised. There is youth and beauty sitting there in front of me."

There was a low laugh as the Queen got up.

"Promises kept! To be sure! When I get to the carriage I shall direct my retainers to bring in the chest of gold. A monarch always keeps her promise!" She turned. "But as you know, in human form, we cannot continue to renew the body forever. She will die and we will have to go back. It is not good to be without form."

"Ah! Myotark and Kyaldee. There will always be Queens searching for youth and beauty. I am sure I will find another for you when the time comes."

"Be sure of that. I trust you will not forget our bargain, good Kaptaka. We have given you time, if not beauty. So. Be ever vigilant. We were kept waiting too long this time. We will not tolerate this happening again." Both the words and the stance of the body had a touch of menace in them. "Remember: without us, your time cannot be renewed." A dark smile flowed across the Queen's face. "It would be a shame if this cottage were to become — empty." At the door she paused and gave Kaptaka one last hard look. "There are other witches, you know."

"I understand." Kaptaka bowed.

Outside she could hear the words and gasps of admiration from the retainers as they beheld the Queen's youth and beauty. There was the sound of the chest being lifted from the carriage, the door opening and the heavy sound as the great box was hurriedly dropped on the floor. The door slammed. The rattle of the carriage and the sounds of the horses faded into the distance.

"Your wish is my command — Majesty," Kaptaka said into the empty room.

She moved to the side of the bubbling cauldron.

"And we shall see what we shall see." A dark and crooked smile of her own spread across her face as she stared into the roiling contents. "My good Myotark and Kyaldee — there are also other cats, you know."

❄

William A. Sell is a retired school teacher. He has been writing most of his life, but this is his first professional publication. He hopes that 65 isn't too old to start a writing career, "But then," he notes, "look at Grandma Moses!"

Allison Fiona Hershey is an eclectic artist and writer living in Southern California. Her published work has graced computer software covers and science fiction and fantasy publications. In addition to her freelance career she is art director for The Dreamers Guild, a computer software design company.

Artwork by Allison Fiona Hershey

It was night. It was always night. Orson Walker froze, afraid to move forward, but unwilling to move backward. The hair on the back of his neck tingled as if someone was breathing against his neck.

He edged his foot forward and felt the hard ground drop away sharply. He wiggled his toes and felt nothing under them.

How long since he had seen the bright sun? He had no way of knowing. Time passed at its own pace in this world in which he found himself trapped.

Orson reached out with his sword, using it as a staff to feel his way across this unknown, unseen landscape.

Clang. Clang. Air. He lowered the tip of the sword a few inches. Clang. Clang.

Orson stood on the edge of a short drop. Not really much at all, but if he hadn't stopped when he did, he might have fallen.

How he wished he was home. Home was safe. But here in this dark world, he was lost, he was helpless. What had he done to deserve this? Had the king's

Dragon Path

by James Rada, Jr.

sorcerer cursed him for failing the king's work and sent him to this world?

To his left, something wailed, loud and deep. A dragon? He shifted his weight to his rear foot and lifted the sword. Not much of a defense against a dragon, but it was all he had.

How far away was the beast? Could the creatures of this world see through the darkness?

The dragon roared past him; he smelled its fetid breath and felt the air shift as it moved close by him. Orson froze on the side of the dragon path, hoping the beast wouldn't see him.

He could only imagine its appearance. As large as an elephant, but covered with scales and a serpentine head. It moved quickly, despite its size, so it must have powerful legs.

Orson had to cross this dragon path to continue, for he knew home lay ahead. Forward, always forward, until he found the end to this dark world. He could not show weakness or he would die. He could not wait for morning to come; he knew it would not. He would be forever in darkness.

He waited until the sounds of the dragon faded.

"Wagons, ho!" he whispered to himself.

Orson stepped down and walked forward, using his sword to make sure there were no more sudden drops that might trip him up.

He wondered how much farther it would be until he had passed through the dragon path. A yard or a mile? Probably closer to the former, though it felt like the latter. He could hear other beasts around him, speaking and growling. He avoided them and kept on his course.

The roar of the beasts grew louder as they approached him. He tried not to panic. He hurried his step, hoping to make it across the dragon path.

Something grabbed his arm from behind. He'd been found! He pulled away, rolling to the side and raising his sword in defense. He stepped on something underfoot that disturbed the smooth plain of the dragon path. Whatever it was rolled and he lost his balance; Orson felt himself falling.

He hit the ground hard and gasped for breath. He let go of his sword. He heard it tumble across the path.

Too late, he heard a dragon roar again. The ground trembled under his body. The beast was approaching. He imagined he could see it charging like a elephant-sized cheetah. The roar grew louder, almost deafening. Orson would not be able to avoid it.

He heard a loud scream as the beast moved in for the kill. Orson closed his eyes and covered his head with his arms.

The attack never came.

"Hey, buddy, get out of the road before you get hit!"

Orson raised his head. His sightless eyes couldn't see the driver of the pickup truck. In his mind, he imagined himself as an armored knight standing with his sword plunged into the side of dragon.

Orson groped around the road for his cane. Some other pedestrian helped him to his feet and handed him the cane.

"Are you all right?" the woman asked.

Taking his sword, Orson dusted himself off. "Yes, I tripped on something."

Orson moved off to the side of Center Street. He was now only two blocks away from home with no more roads to cross, but his apartment building did have three flights of stairs to climb to his apartment.

As he entered the building, he used his cane to feel for the first step. In his mind, the stairs changed into a mountain. Orson would scale this mountain in the dead of night, and at the top of the mountain, he would unlock the secrets to the universe or, perhaps, open a Pandora's Box. He was unsure which it would be today; he would soon know.

James Rada Jr. has been a freelance writer for six years and began shifting several years ago from non-fiction to fiction. He is currently trying to sell a fantasy novel inspired by Hopi myths. He lives in Cumberland, Maryland.

Ray Williams has won numerous awards at conventions and art shows all over the United States. He has recently entered the field of children's books with his first major work coming out in 1995. His work may be found at Wizards in Kirkland, WA. He lives in Longview, WA with the obligatory cat and several airbrushes.

FANTASY Magazine Talks to Writers:

Paramental Anguish

by Ann Sharp

It ought to be possible to plot and write a fantasy story, or to use magic or the paranormal in your work, but still avoid *paramental anguish.*

I have been reading a number of books which make quite free with various tools of the "new age" philosophy (for want of a better phrase), some well-written, some just plain silly. Just what are their proper literary uses?

First, what exactly are we talking about? Well, the list includes astrology, channeling, clairaudience, clairsentience, clairvoyance, cryptozoology, crystal balls, dowsing, ESP, exorcism, fortean phenomena, hypnosis, I Ching, Kirlian auras, magical powers, mind over matter, mystic experiences, out-of-body experiences, palmistry, parapsychology, past lives, poltergeists, psychometry, pyramid power, runes, spiritual healing, tarot, tea leaves, telekenisis, telepathy, witchcraft. There are probably others; I picked these off a Fate magazine T-shirt!

Obviously, these tools can be used to add color and glamor and mystery to a plot, but they could curdle a previously acceptable plot just as easily. How should they be used in plotting a story? With care, that's how.

A sympathetic character overcomes an *almost-insuperable problem* by *his* or *her own efforts* to achieve a *worthwhile goal.*

If you merely think backwards from the powers your character will need to conquer the problem when you create your character, you may have problems with the readers' sympathy: Does your character use his/her psychic talent with good manners, or regard it as a haunting license? As Aslan said in **THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER** by C.S. Lewis, "Eavesdropping by magic is still eavesdropping." Your character will be more interesting (and the suspense greater) if s/he needs to develop previously-latent talent or learn how to use it, with room for educational failures — especially if the threat has a deadline.

Don't let the colorful, fascinating possibilities of exploring the psychic world blind you. Your readers will think your story is perfectly silly if your character or your reader could have solved the problem immediately in a simple, mundane way. How almost-insuperable is the problem if your character has only to tune into the cosmic party line to know it all? You have trivialized your story if your hero *should* be able to solve the problem in no time with the psychic powers or arcane knowledge you have given him. This is exactly on a par with the sort of romance novel where the hero or heroine overhears some chance remark that leads to a hundred and eighty pages of "conflict" when fifteen seconds of plain speaking ("That's the Harvey you're sleeping with? The one with the long plumy tail?") would have cleared up everything. The fight against the almost-insuperable odds is more valid if your character is barely powerful enough, or barely skilled enough, or is still developing power or learning skills, or this threat is much greater than was ever expected.

Do not diminish your character's own efforts by letting the lords of karma do all the work—this is *deus ex machina* with a vengeance! There's a fine line between using psychic tools to aid in solving a problem and using them to solve the problem. If it's too easy ("...then Elijah reared back and passed a miracle, and they all lived happily ever after"), it's boring. Besides, the lords of karma have better things to do this Tuesday than drop by for tea and gossip.

As long as you do focus on your character's efforts, though, this is the part of the plot that allows you to bring in the colorful, glamorous, mysterious background research you've been doing, and to develop the character as the hero tries, fails, learns from the failures, grows, and develops. Before anything else, and certainly before your plot is outlined in cast iron, read up on the subject. This is very important. You and your psychic characters have to know what they're talking about. You will sound extremely stupid if you confuse astral travel with the Enterprise's transporter, or if a tarot reading tells your heroine the phone number of the pizza parlor. What can be done, and what can't be done, with whatever skill you had in mind? Learn the limits and keep within them.

Stay focused on the problem. Thirty-five pages explaining astrology — even if you could cover the subject — is NOT moving the action of your story forward, is it? But then, the reader must pick up enough details to follow your plot and your characters wherever they're going. If your character lectures endlessly on the mathematics of astrological charting, the general reader STILL won't have enough back-

ground to follow.

What can YOU do with these tools? Certainly several of them — past-life regression, tarot and other open-ended forms of divination come to mind — can be used to provide insight into characters' minds and motivations...so can standard psychology. They can move the action forward—the classic story opening of the one twin knowing the other is in trouble, or the casual seance or psychometry session which provides some unexpected surprise. They can be used to introduce characters: if it weren't for astrology, after all, the Magi would never have met Herod. Obviously, they can cause change and growth in characters.

This brings us to the worthwhile goal: which must appear worth while (and worth all this effort) to *both* the character *and* the readers. (Heroine goes to great effort to channel information from her spirit medium on the astral plane, because she hopes that information received will avert World War III. Information received, alas, seems to consist entirely of aphorisms which any well-read reader can identify from William Penn's **NO CROSS, NO CROWN**, currently available in paperback.) Unknown dreadful evils have a way of sounding more like a heavy fog than an immediate danger; be specific. Past-life regression should not be undertaken to improve your grades in History 101 — the professor isn't likely to believe your findings anyway. Nor does the D.A.R. accept tapes of past-life regression sessions as proof of lineage.

Final warning: be very careful not to encourage amateurs to get into trouble. If your purple-skinned characters from Rigel VI practice self-healing by crystal, fine — as long as they mine the crystals on Rigel VI and the only one on Terra is the one in your story. Please avoid tempting any Terran reader to replace insulin, or a splint, or pre-natal care, with a quartz crystal and "natural self-healing as practiced by the ancients." The ancients are, after all, DEAD — which the reader may be, too, and probably sooner than he would have been otherwise. Most readers are charming, intelligent people with basic common sense, but one in ten thousand will identify too closely with fictional characters and convince him or herself that "emotional" really means a "telepathic sensitive" or "empath," and that the *years* of strict education and training the FICTIONAL character suffered through aren't necessary for someone with HIS natural capacity/profound wisdom/unusual maturity. Better prevention than cure.

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Writers Talk Back:
What Didst Thou Say?
(Archaic Grammar for Fantasy Authors)

by Heather Rose Jones

"I know thy name, and also why ye hath come."
"And how didst ye come to know my name?"
(excerpted from an actual rejected manuscript)

Does this sound grammatically correct to you? If not, can you explain why?

There are many ways to try to evoke an archaic "old world" flavor in a story. One of the most perilous for the beginning writer is to try to use the language forms and patterns of earlier ages. Most English-speaking people take their model for "forsoothly" language from familiar literature of the 16th and 17th centuries: usually Shakespeare or the King James version of the Bible. However, this familiarity is rarely deep enough for the average person to reproduce that version of the language accurately.

A complete description of the nuances of Early Modern English could (and does) fill volumes, but the simplest way to add a forsoothly flavor to your language with little effort is to master the use of archaic pronouns and verb forms. The rules given in this article were not absolute, but they will prevent you from making obvious mistakes.

The difficult pronouns of archaic English are all in the second person — "you" in its various forms. Originally, English had two second person pronouns: thou was used when speaking to one person and *ye* when speaking to more than one person. Sometime around the 13th century — a century before Chaucer's **CANTERBURY TALES** — *ye* began to be used in formal situations for single persons too. So you would use *thou* to your friends, equals, and inferiors, but *ye* to groups of people or to social superiors and those you wanted to honor. Gradually, something like "honorific inflation" occurred and people used *ye* to equals or simply when being polite. *Thou* was limited to very close friends and to social inferiors when you wanted to emphasize that social inferiority. The use of *Thou* when addressing God was meant to show the extreme intimacy of the relationship, not to comment on God's social status! (If you are familiar with the nuances of the similar German *du* or French *tu*, you know that it can be insulting to use them to someone other than a close friend or a child.) Eventually, *thou* dropped out of ordinary language entirely because people found it easier just to be "polite" to everyone.

The second step to mastering archaic pronouns is to know which form of the word to use in which situations, but if you can handle *I/me/my/mine* you can handle *thou/thee/thy/thine*. In fact, that is probably the best way to check whether you

have the right form of this pronoun: substitute the corresponding form of "I" and see if it sounds right.

"Did he see thou?"

Substitute: *"Did he see I?"* Wrong!

"Did he see thee?"

Substitute: *"Did he see me?"* Right.

I've been referring to *ye* as the plural/formal pronoun above, but today, of course, we use *you*. What's the difference? Originally, *ye* was the nominative form, the one used as a subject or anywhere you would use *I, he, we*. *You* was the accusative/dative form, used where you would use *me, him, us*. This distinction is found consistently in Chaucer's language (14th century) and in the King James Bible (1611). Shakespeare, on the other hand, sometimes confuses the two and uses them indiscriminately. Eventually, *ye* dropped out of ordinary use and *you* was used consistently for both.

The other place where forsoothly language slips up most often and most egregiously is in the verb forms that go with *thou* and the archaic forms for the third person singular (*he/she/it*).

The clearest mark of the verb forms for *thou* are that they end in "-st": *thou hast, thou hadst, thou comest, thou wouldst*. There are a few exceptions, mostly for forms of "to be" and for modal verbs: *thou art* (you are), *thou wilt* (you will), *thou wert* (you were), and *thou shalt* (you shall). There are also some verbs where the form isn't entirely predictable: *thou durst* (you dare).

The archaic verb ending for *he/she/it* is "-(e)th". You can substitute this for the "-s" ending in present tense verbs almost universally: *he comes > he cometh, she says > she sayeth*. For the most part, you can't use it for the common auxiliary verbs: to be, to have, can, might, shall, etc. The one notable exception is *he has > he hath*. Don't use it in past tense verbs at all: no *he cameth, she saideth*!

Many people try for a forsoothly flavor by sprinkling their language with "be"s and "did"s. *"Be you a stranger here?" "And he did go into the inn."* Both of these are more a matter of local dialect than archaism and, unless used very sparingly, are more likely to make language sound awkward than old.

(One side note to the whole question of archaic language concerns certain social or religious groups in the modern world which have preserved older uses. For a long time, it was a characteristic of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, that they had jumped in the opposite direction on the "politeness inflation" question. They felt that all people should be treated equally, but chose to use the familiar pronoun, rather than the formal one, to everyone. But even this usage changed with time and, among those who still use "plain speech", thee is used in place of both thou and thee, and the special verb forms have been dropped in favor of the verb forms used with *he/she*. Thus: *thee is, thee has, thee says*. But mostly "plain speech" has been abandoned as an anachronistic affectation.)

So let's look back at our opening quote and see *why* it is wrong.

"I know thy name, and also why ye hath come."

"And how didst ye come to know my name?"

First of all, in both cases only a single person is being addressed. The alternation between *ye* and *thy* is inconsistent; either *ye/your* or *thou/thy* should be used. I, personally, would avoid using ye for the singular. Although it is correct for earlier centuries, the early 17th century sources which form the model for forsoothly speech tended to use ye as the archaic plural and you as the formal singular form. Secondly, the author has used verb forms with ye (*ye hath, ye didst*) that don't go with that pronoun at all. *Hath* goes only with *he/she/it* (or with singular nouns) and d*idst* goes only with *thou*. Instead of evoking an earlier age, the author has only managed to display his ignorance of that most important author's tool: language.

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Heather Rose Jones, in addition to serving as ***FANTASY Magazine***'s subscription department, secretary to the publisher, and general office help, is the magazine's resident linguist. She is a graduate student in that field at U.C. Berkeley, specializing in the metaphoric grammaticalization of Medieval Welsh prepositions. She made her fictional debut this year in **SWORD AND SORCERESS XII.**

Letters

OTHER FANTASY MARKETS?

Colleen A. McAndrew, Universal City, TX

I would like to compliment you on the high quality of your magazine. The stories are fun to read, the interviews are helpful in providing both writing tips and new names to look for. The interview with Jennifer Roberson was especially helpful; I had never heard of her and have discovered that I really enjoy her writing. One quick question: can you recommend any other good fantasy markets, where I can send stories that don't meet your requirements? The directories in my school library mention very few, if any, fantasy buyers, and most of those prefer to work with older, more experienced writers (I'm 16).

You could try a specialized directory, like ***SCIENCE FICTION WRITER'S MARKETPLACE****, and read the "Markets" columns in both* Science Fiction Chronicle *and in* Locus. *(Your local city library may subscribe to these periodicals.) Age doesn't matter. There are sixteen-year-olds who write brilliantly and sixty-year-olds who can't write their way out of a paper bag. No professional market is going to give you a break because of your age, but neither should they hold it against you if your writing is of professional quality. —**MZB***

It helps if your work is presented in proper manuscript format, with good spelling, proper punctuation, clear sentence structure (these two are closely related, in fact), and appropriate paragraphing. Proper punctuation for dialogue especially seems to present diffi-

culties for young writers, whose schools often seem to handicap them by avoiding any correction of the ***form*** *of writing, apparently focussing only on content.—**REH***

REVIEWING THE OPTIONS

Ellen Yamamoto, Berkeley, CA

Have you considered having a book review section in *FANTASY Magazine*? I've just entered the different world of fantasy — there are so many books and one must be selective. (Not that I want to be selective, but I just don't have time to read everything!)

It's not practical for us to have a book review column: since we publish quarterly, there'd usually be a long gap between when we received a publisher's galley proofs (on which reviews are based) and our publication date. By the time a review reached you, a book you wanted to read might no longer be on sale. The best magazines for reviews are published frequently, like Publisher's Weekly. *I personally enjoy the monthly* New York Review of Science Fiction *(which, discusses fantasy as well as sf) for reviews which not only tell you about the book, but often (for instance) discuss two apparently unrelated books and tell you* how *they are in fact connected to each other. And the regular "Read This" sidebars by various authors provide fascinating suggestions for non-chemical mind expansion. —**REH***

ANATOMY OF A STORY

Wendy Sornberger, Rexford, NY

I'd like to make a suggestion — or maybe I should call it a request. After reading so many wonderfully entertaining stories in this magazine, I'd love to read about the creative process involved in the writing of these stories. Would it be possible (from time to time) to interview one or more of the authors of these great stories? I'd really like to know how they got the idea for a particular magazine story and how they took this one idea and created a polished piece of short fiction from it.

*I'm not sure the whole readership would be that interested in the anatomy of a single story. You'll find that our interviews often contain details of the background and construction of various works in an author's career. —**REH***

MORE ON LORD DUNSANY'S WORKS

Darrell Schweitzer, Strafford, PA

Re: Julie Brodsky's letter in issue #28, Lord Dunsany was an essential fantasy writer, whose work any would-be fantasist should study closely. He was also one of the most prolific short-story writers ever. There are about 150 uncollected Dunsany stories, some of which I've reprinted in *Weird Tales/Worlds of Fantasy & Horror*. His main collections are **THE GODS OF PEGANA, TIME AND THE GODS, THE SWORD OF WELLERAN, A DREAMER'S TALES, FIFTY-ONE TALES, THE LAST BOOK OF WONDER**, and **THE MAN WHO ATE THE PHOENIX**, plus five volumes of the Jorkens tales. The best modern compilation is GODS, MEN AND GHOSTS from Dover (ed. E.F. Bleiler). There are three Dunsany collections in the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series. The key novels are **THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER, DON RODRIGUEZ, THE CHARWOMAN'S SHADOW**, and **THE CURSE OF THE WISE WOMAN**. Indeed, many are not in print. I have been looking for **JORKENS HAS A LARGE WHISKEY** (1940) for over twenty years. But just because a book is out of print does not mean it is not essential. That's why some books are so expensive in the used-book market. A terrible lot of the classics of fantasy are not readily available. The field badly needs another reprint series like the one Lin Carter did for Ballantine in the early '70s.

ADDICTED TO FANTASY

Sherri Trumbull, Basin WY

I recently ordered the Mercedes Lackey Special of your magazine, as I am a *huge* fan of Misty's. Something interesting occurred. I found myself addicted! In most magazines I buy, I only pick and choose what to read, but I found myself reading your magazines cover to cover.

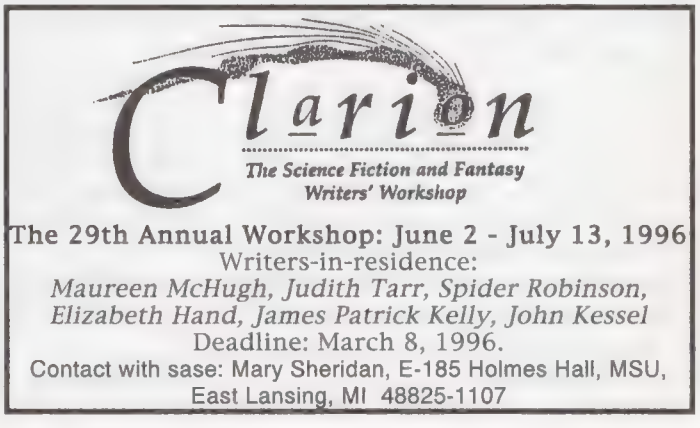
*(Aha! Our secret strategy worked!) While we certainly can't guarantee that all our readers will like every single story, it only stands to reason that if you like one of our authors you may well like many others. Our "Mercedes Lackey Package" was so overwhelmingly popular that we are now just about sold out of every issue it included (except for #23, which we had to reprint). —**HRJ***

THE PRICE OF PERSISTENCE

Robert F. Cline, Saratoga Springs NY

I'm taking about two months off to work on a novel, so you won't be receiving the outpourings of short stories that I've been sending you lately. But you might be interested in a writer's perspective. In the last three months, I've written sixteen stories, none of which have been accepted. The first one was submitted exactly twenty-six times to different magazines. In an off moment, I figured out the average cost per submission — it came out to $2.16 — so I've spent well over $50 submitting that single manuscript. I don't know why I went into all this, but it might be of interest to you.

*It can be hard to figure out what a rejection "means" (other than the obvious — that that particular editor didn't buy the story). If a story is rejected twenty-six times in a row, there are three things to consider. 1) Is the story "publishable" at all, in the sense of being well-written, entertaining, and properly formatted? If the rejection notes are at all personalized beyond "does not suit our needs at this time" you will often be given feedback on this point. Do you re-read the story each time before sending it out to check whether it still represents your best work? 2) Are you targeting your market carefully enough? Are you absolutely certain that your story's subject matter and treatment fit with what each of those magazines publish? More than once, I've read a submission and said, "This is wonderful, but it isn't fantasy." 3) What are the economic considerations at this point in your career? A good rule of thumb might be to spend no more in submitting a story than you could possibly hope to earn from it, but a beginning writer may see the process more as an investment in publicity than as direct income. —**HRJ*** ❄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Wishes

by Beatrice Lanctot

Jamal woke up grinning happily, fragments of the sweet dream still clinging to his eyelids. For a night, he had been Khalif of Baghdad, surrounded by beautiful women, sipping sorbet from golden cups, rich beyond imagination in a marble palace amidst rose gardens and shimmering fountains.

He looked around in dismay. He was in the same drab room and the clatter of donkey hoofs hauling carts to the market reminded him to hurry. The kadi wasn't a very harsh master, but Jamal always tried to please the old judge who often lent him rare scrolls and treated him as if he were equal to the other students, sons of the rich and noble.

Out in the harsh sunlight, Jamal realized he would have no time for breaking fast. He sighed and turned into the alley leading to the master's house, and as he started running he almost stumbled over the shapeless beggar crouched in the dust. Stirred, the old man raised a trembling hand. "Alms, in the name of Allah, the All Powerful and Compassionate."

He couldn't really afford it, but since he didn't have time for food this morning, Jamal decided that at least the old man should have a bite. He threw a couple of copper dinars in the bowl and started running, the echo of the beggar's blessing in his ears. "May Allah grant you your heart's desire, may your dreams come true ..."

"Inshallah," Jamal thought fervently, wisps of the golden dream floating in his mind, and kept on running. The day passed as usual, since he made it to the kadi's house on time. He even caught a glance of the judge's daughter, beautiful Nurenhar, so the day was better than most. As he fell asleep that night, he recalled the old man's words and sighed wistfully.

The next morning, sun shone gently on his face, filtered through gauze curtains, and Jamal opened his eyes lazily, then sat up with a start. A hushed whisper arose in the room. "Behold, the magnificent one awakens," and soft music started playing behind a wall of lacquered panels. Startled, Jamal fell back on soft cushions. "I'm still dreaming," he thought. A few moments later, he tried opening his eyes again. The music didn't go away. Instead, an old man resplendent in a scarlet tunic embroidered with gold bowed deeply and offered him a silver bowl filled with rose water for washing, and Nubian slaves appeared, walking softly over the silk carpets, carrying trays from which the most enticing aromas drifted in the air.

Jamal pinched himself to make sure he was awake, but the pain didn't quite convince him, so he tried to sip the fragrant coffee steaming in a cup thinner than eggshells. The liquid burned his mouth and he let out a shriek, at the same time dropping the cup which shattered on shining tiles. "That's it," he thought, "now either I wake up or they'll have my head cut off for breaking the cup," but none of that happened. Instead, everybody dropped on their knees in silence, and Jamal started to feel foolish and a bit annoyed.

Artwork by Stan Bruns

"Rise, all of you. What's this? What's going on? Where am I and why do you people bow to me like I'm the khalif?" Trembling, the old man rose and kissed the hem of the silk shift Jamal was wearing.

"Forgive us, o magnificent one, and may the blessings of Allah accompany your every step. Of course you are the khalif. Perhaps the food you had last night has given you bad dreams, if you don't recognize your most humble servant. If so, tell me and I'll have the cooks whipped for their mistake. As for the idiot who has served you that vile potion, he is a dead man."

Astonished, Jamal glanced at his surroundings. The room was more beautiful than he had imagined, closed with carved doors of sandalwood, decorated with gem-encrusted daggers and tall silver vases filled with rare flowers. As soon as he started walking, slaves armed with peacock feather fans rushed on his footsteps until he turned around and glared at them.

"Nobody is going to get killed or whipped today. Please leave me alone, all of you." The slaves slid out gracefully and the old man followed suit, but before leaving he turned and told Jamal that the court was assembled and waiting for him to judge the day's cases, after which emissaries from Cairo would present him with gifts sent in by the sultan, in sign of respect and friendship.

Once alone, Jamal's first thought was to get dressed and get out of the palace before anybody realized he was just a poor kadi's apprentice, but then he noticed the clothes laid out for him on a couch and decided it was worth hanging around even if he was going to get beheaded. Besides, he mused, it could still be a dream, after all.

The day progressed in the same miraculous fashion. Robed in green silks and adorned with a turban pinned with a huge emerald, Jamal attended to the khalif's duties as best as he could, remembering the judgments passed by the kadi and his haughty manners when he was seeing supplicants.

Jamal's satisfaction at the sudden turn of events didn't last long. Instead of love and devotion, his presence inspired loathing and fear in his subjects, long accustomed to the real khalif's sudden bouts of anger which usually resulted in harsh punishments for the slightest mistake. Following that first disappointment, Jamal slowly realized that his exalted position brought but little happiness.

After a week, he was bored stiff, worried sick, and all he could dream of was his small, drab room and the kadi's beautiful daughter. At first it had been pleasant, eating delicate dishes, visiting the treasury filled with gold and gems, his every wish taken care of by the slaves swarming around. After a while, though, not being able to go alone even when attending to his body's needs became annoying.

The food and snow-cooled wine were great, but seeing two food tasters fall lifeless in front of him turned each delicious morsel into ashes. Apparently, the khalif's many enemies wanted him dead, and despite all precautions taken he was in constant danger of being poisoned. The gardens weren't safe, either. Behind rose bushes death could await, hidden in the hands of skilled assassins.

Artwork by Stan Bruns

Jamal thought he looked great in fine silk and shiny brocade and would have dearly loved to show himself in the suk, but his viziers were afraid of public revolt at the sight of his magnificence. The high taxes and harsh laws he had imposed upon the city hadn't made him very popular with the crowds.

He had anticipated heavenly pleasures inside the closely guarded harem, but again the advisors warned him that his first wife, daughter of a powerful king whose help he might need, would be insulted since her husband had so far shown no interest in her. At that, Jamal let out a cry of despair, but the viziers begged him to ensure a legal heir from his first wife before begetting any other offspring. Jamal entered his wife's chambers, or rather the khalif's wife, willing to do his duty but the woman was ugly enough to turn a camel's stomach, so he hastily left.

All in all, Jamal felt miserable. Being the khalif was less pleasurable and far more dangerous than he had expected. He missed the evenings spent in the company of friends with games and fun, and he missed the kadi's rusty voice, always quoting the Holy Book or offering fatherly advice.

As he fell asleep on down-filled pillows, Jamal prayed for forgiveness for his previous nearsightedness and hoped Allah, in his mercy, would restore him in the shabby room filled with books where he had been truly happy.

Allah must have listened to him, because the next day when he woke up, gone were the slaves and rose gardens, gone were the viziers and silk robes. He lay on the straw pallet and sighed contentedly, then after hasty ablutions started running once again towards the kadi's house.

At the corner, Jamal almost tripped over the withered beggar huddled in a tattered robe. His heart singing, he threw the old man a few coins and continued on his way.

Behind him, the djinn stretched and smiled, pleased with himself. The human shape he wore dissolved, and the djinn thought it would be another hundred years until his lord would send him on the mortal plane to help another man find true happiness.

Before departing for a higher plane, he looked inside the palace where a gentler khalif, made wiser by his experience of living as a kadi's apprentice, would awaken under the silk coverlet. He then turned towards the kadi's house and his immortal eyes peeled off the layers of the future, where he could see Jamal dressed in a kadi's robes, passing out judgments, while Nurenhar planned their daughter's wedding to a young, poor apprentice. The djinn grinned. "Humans! Good thing I know better than them their true heart's desire." Then he disappeared in a cloud of dust, glittering gold in the morning sun.

❄

Beatrice C. Lanctot was born in Romania and went to college first in Bucharest and then in Montreal, Canada. She currently lives in Seattle with her husband and cat. She notes that after moving to Montreal from sf-poor Romania, "I thought I'd died and gone to heaven." She would like to dedicate this, her first published story, to her husband, Stephen.

Stan Bruns traded in his business suit for an artist's smock in 1986 and hasn't looked back. He was fan artist guest of honor at Chattacon in 1990 and is owner/operator of a gallery called the Arts Pavilion in Roswell, GA.

Artwork by Stan Bruns

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Neither/Nor

by Mary Catelli

Three of the upstairs rooms had lights on, but the porch light was dark. Marguerite Goldsmith glared at it; she had told her nieces when she was arriving for a reason. Muttering fiercely, she dropped her heavy suitcase on the porch and fumbled for the key. The lock was all but invisible against the dark wood of the door; Marguerite did not even try looking for it, but felt for it.

The door screeched open. There was no sound from upstairs. Marguerite picked up her suitcase and shifted it inside before reaching for the light. Pale yellow light filled the main hall, even though half the light bulbs had burned out and not been replaced.

Marguerite had known that her nieces were disasters at housekeeping. She hadn't known it was *this* bad. Paths of dirt marking the way through discarded papers and coats tossed aside; shoes thrown by the stairs; houseplants wilting on the hall table.

Taking one look about, she shouted, "Lydia! Laura! Linnet!"

Two sets of footsteps clattered in the rooms overhead. Linnet came bounding down the stairs, her blonde hair bouncing in twin braids down her back. "Aunt Tweet! You're here!"

Marguerite sniffed. "Well, of course I'm here. It is not every day that one is suddenly bequeathed with the guardianship of three nieces — or perhaps pigs."

Lydia started down the stairs; she was very pale, especially next to Linnet's rosy cheeks. "We did our best," she said, and gestured helplessly. "But with schoolwork and Daddy's illness and all...things just slid."

"And then there was the poltergeist," declared Linnet, quite proud of the long word.

Marguerite whipped her head around to look at her niece. "What?"

Linnet started hopping on one foot. "We went to sleep one night, just after Daddy went to the hospital, and in the morning, everything downstairs was a wreck, and the doctor that Child Welfare called in said it was a poltergeist — probably Laura. But they called in another doctor and he said it was just one of us making mischief." She grinned. "And they're both trying to prove who's right." *Since one of them has to be*, Tweet thought, and smiled to herself. "And things have gotten worse — sometimes dishes get broken and food gets spilled all over the place. So we've got *scientists* right here. Isn't it neat?"

Tweet suppressed her smile. "No, it isn't neat. In fact it's a pigsty. Go get Laura, Lydia; I don't care if you ruin her latest picture beyond hope of repair — go get her. I'm not staying in a

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

mess like this."

Aunt Tweet swept into the kitchen as Lydia went off to fetch Laura. "Linnet!" The girl jumped before scurrying into the kitchen. Tweet pointed at the sink and the mounds of dirty dishes in it. "When was the last time someone did dishes around here?"

"Err...I think Lydia did some last Sunday."

Aunt Tweet snorted. "Where are the towels, dear? You get to dry. I am going to have to empty out this sink before I wash anything."

The woman was up to her elbows in suds before Laura (still the same dreamy-eyed girl with pale brown hair, Tweet noted) and Lydia appeared, but without turning, Aunt Tweet set them to emptying the hall so they could mop it. "And water those plants as well!" she ordered as things started to move in the hallway. One of them hurried upstairs to fetch the water, and Tweet turned her attention back to the dishes.

"It's certainly going to impress the scientists," Lydia observed. "One of them was complaining to Child Welfare...."

"The scientists?" Aunt Tweet asked sharply, turning. Laura hesitated in the middle of hanging up a coat.

"Why, yes, they're coming tonight," observed Laura. She tilted her head to one side. "I had forgotten."

Tweet snorted. "Well, you can turn on the porch light for them, even if you couldn't for me."

Half an hour later, the hall was halfway respectable. Tweet put a hand through her hair. "I've still got to make up my bed," she muttered. She cast a glance at her nieces. "And we've still got to do the rest of the house."

The doorbell rang. "I'll get it," Lydia said. Laura hesitated with her hands full of books. Linnet turned from putting the last glass in the cabinet. She sat perched on the counter, the towel hanging in her hand, as the two men came in. Aunt Tweet folded her arms and contemplated the men.

"Dr. Pettifogger, Dr. Gobbledygook, good evening. Our aunt is here now."

"I see, I see — this sudden burst of housecleaning is her handiwork?" said a man's voice, jovially.

"My sister's rolling over in the grave from the mess," announced Aunt Tweet, turning a little but keeping her hands in the sudsy water. "And you two are?"

A tall thin man in a business suit sniffed. "I am Dr. Horatio Pettifogger; I am here to investigate Dr. Gobbledygook's claims with regard to your nieces."

Dr. Gobbledygook shrugged and spread out his hands. "Your nieces have told you of the unusual occurrences in this household?"

"Nothing unusual about troublemaking," Pettifogger muttered.

"When Child Welfare investigated after your brother-in-law went into the hospital, it seemed clear that one of your nieces is manifesting poltergeistic abilities." He looked at his notebook. "Probably Laura. I have been attempting to confirm the paranormal aspect."

Pettifogger broke in. "Nothing paranormal about adolescent mischief. I am quite certain that Lydia is causing the commotion by perfectly normal means. And it would be Lydia — the most apparently calm child clearly has the most repressed emotion."

Lydia did not repress her glare at the doctor's back.

"Uh, Aunt Tweet, the mop and stuff are in the cellar," said Laura, interrupting.

"So get them, dear," said Tweet, and turning back to the doctors, dismissed them. "I have to get this house in decent shape." She smiled vaguely and went back to remembering where the sheets were kept — if the girls had remembered to do enough laundry.

Pettifogger, fretting with his briefcase, cleared his throat. "We are figuring out which it is."

"If either." Her voice was dismissive.

Gobbledygook frowned. "It has to be one."

Tweet smiled. "That's hardly an exhaustive list of causes," she observed. *Although,* she thought, *I don't think you'll believe my explanation.*

Pettifogger reddened and puffed up. "Well, Ms. Goldsmith, no one's suggested anything else."

Tweet spread her dripping hands. "Then, by all means, attempt to identify it."

Linnet sat in the porch swing, her feet just reaching far enough to push herself. She did not remember to push often; her attention was concentrated on the papers in her lap.

"...there were no more incidents of poltergeist activity," she read from Gobbledygook's report. Marguerite, sitting on the porch steps in the last sunlight of evening, barely listened, concentrating on the hem she was mending. "Clearly the arrival of Miss Goldsmith and its promised renewal of ordinary routines relieved the subconscious stress causing the phenomenon." She shrugged and picked up her lemonade.

A minute later, she lifted her face from the glass. "Did Dr. Pettifogger send you a report, too?"

"Yes," said Aunt Tweet, not looking up from her sewing. "Said Lydia couldn't raise any more trouble with me sleeping in the master bedroom." She snorted. "Means the same thing — can't recognize the real cause when they see one."

"But they didn't see one." Linnet gulped her lemonade. "At least I didn't see one."

"Well, they're scientists; they're supposed to deduce these things from the evidence." Aunt Tweet lay aside the embroidery to get a saucer from the cabinet and milk from the fridge. Linnet watched her intently as she set the saucer by the fireplace.

"We haven't got a cat," Linnet announced.

"I know, Linnet. To bed."

Linnet scampered off to bed.

The grandfather clock woke Linnet at midnight. She lay in bed a minute longer before she tried creeping out into the hallway. She slept at the end of the hallway farthest from the stairway, but Laura, Lydia, and Aunt Tweet slept still — Aunt Tweet snored. Carefully, Linnet walked down the hallway and halfway down the stairs.

The little light Aunt Tweet left on in the kitchen was still on, and clearly showed the quite contented brownie lapping up the milk.

❄

Mary Catelli has been writing ever since one day, at age twelve, when she found herself out of books to read. She has previously appeared in **SWORD AND SORCERESS XI** and *Cricket*. This is her third sale, and she says she has hopes that her writing income will soon cover her postage expenses. She lives in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk is a two-time recipient of the Canadian Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement. She lives in Edmonton, Alberta where she and her husband, the lovely and talented Steve Fahnestalk, have just completed their first book cover.

The Last Word

We got the following message from eluki bes shahar about her story, "Long Divorce of Steel", in ***MZBFM*** #28.

"Grumble.

"I've just gotten MZBFM #28 with =Long Divorce of Steel= in it, and to my annoyance, the typesetter seems to have pitched several fits on page 2. If you happen to read the story, please add in the following material to the jumbled sections (the areas starting and ending the sections appear in the story, so you'll know where you are.)

"I. (p. 23 column 1 pgf. 4)

"Ice was necessary to that aspect of Nain's business that was conducted in the open light of day — at least it was once winter was over. In winter all the summer delicacies of Rimmon's nobility were available to any Edgewalker — meat and milk and eggs that did not spoil, and the over-proof snow brandy made by chilling jugs of spirit in jars of brine until the water in the brandy rose to the top and froze.

"But that was in winter. In summer, meat spoiled quickly; many a fleshmonger watched his wares languish in the hot sun until, for all his sluicing them with the healthful combination of salt and river water, the steaks and chops were shiny and slippery and smelt rot-sweet. No careful housewife would buy these steaks and chops, except perhaps as cat's meat.

"And so at last the relicts were sold, half-penny the pound, to those who hawked them through the streets on trays or high-wheeled carts. Once the meat had been washed and chopped fine and packaged in paper twists (half-penny a packet, three packets for a penny) to hide the bread and offal that had been added, no cat every complained, or died of eating it.

"II. (p. 23 column 2 pgf. 3)

"So on this particular spring day, Nain was going, with dubious legitimacy, to contract for ice. And ice, reasonably, is always delivered at night.

"Which was where his troubles actually began, but before that there was the walk through the Edge to where the ice-house stood, squat and grey, at the brink of Abbana's grey water.

" #

"The canted buildings obscured the light; the twists in the narrow streets baffled sight. One walked in gloom; one's choice of situation was between the slippery pavement where one might be doused with washing-water and worse, and the center of the street with its sluggish, iridescent gutter. Neither gave one much chance of seeing fellow pedestrians before being seen.

"I know this happens to everyone more than once in their careers, and that Rachel (who is after all a friend of mine) and the staff at MZBFM certainly didn't set out to sabotage their own zine, but I am vexed. Sigh. It's probably the heat.

" -- eluki"

Well, I'd grumble and be vexed, too.

I was *mortified* to know this had happened, because the person who didn't catch the error, the person who **did** the layout, the careless typesetter, was of course me. Artistic layout designs are all very well, but they must be secondary to the aim of presenting the author's words to you, the reader, exactly.

Unfortunately, about all I can do at this point is apologize profusely and abjectly to both the author and our readers, and promise to make even greater efforts in the future to proofread everything carefully.

Gee, I hope there aren't any egregious errors (go look it up!) in this issue! But if there are, it wouldn't surprise me — the staff has had more difficulty assembling this issue than any single issue we have ever published, I think. Several of the artists had, uncharacteristically, delays in completing their assignments. (To be sure, there were good reasons; one of the models needed had been in a minor accident and had to recover before she could pose; one of the artists needed minor surgery.) Meanwhile, the software for a new fax modem always locked up the computer so we'd have to reboot to continue working. In fact, the layout computer, a fairly new Mac Quadra 800, began behaving oddly more and more of the time. Alarmed, Heather and I did a *complete* backup, but that took most of two days. Turned out to be a good thing — when we took the computer in for repair, the diagnosis was: new hard disk needed. The shop *was* able to transfer all our old data, but it was a relief to know we had everything saved on disk.

The day we took the Quadra in for repair, we ordered a new computer, a Mac PowerPC. We'd been planning this for a bit, but now our need for three Macs was clear. One for accounting, one for layout and scanning, and one for subscriptions — more or less. (I also keep a PC for database operations.) So of course, the new computer arrived without some of the RAM we had ordered. MacLink wouldn't work on it (still won't), and we had several crucial files, including more artwork, on PC disks. After this, it didn't surprise us when the Quadra came back, seemed to be working fine — but wouldn't recognize its CD-ROM drive, which was needed by one of the staff members for a project. I finally got the new modem working so we can download files from CompuServe or GEnie - but this does **not** mean that we will accept stories in this format. Please continue to send submissions to us the old-fashioned way, printed legibly on good white paper, mailed in envelopes and addressed to us at P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701, USA. The same holds true for unsolicited artwork samples — do not send them electronically.

In the midst of all this confusion, our intern, Stephanie Shaver, seems to have moved on to other projects, so we've hired Margaret Davis to help out. Margaret is, most notably, a fine musician and singer, but she has also had artwork published by us (she did the wonderful illuminated capitals for Mary Frey's story "The Sea-King's Harp" in issue #15), and publishes a nicely-produced newsletter for harpists. We're looking forward to her contributions, though at the moment she's been relegated to helping with the next bulk mailing to entice new subscribers.

This means that the staff now includes two excellent mu-

sicians (in fact, two harpists) plus yours truly, the amateur viola player; and that (the same) three of us have been involved in previous ventures in self-publishing.

Speaking of publishing, it must be time for some Christmas hype: Buy gift subscriptions! What finer gifts could you give your friends/nieces and nephews/minions than their very own subscriptions to *Marion Zimmer Bradley's* ***FANTASY*** *Magazine*? Really. Buy subscriptions. Mention this column, and get a $1 discount off each new sub. (The accountant's gonna kill me.)

Whew! That's out of the way. Pledge break is over.

I hope you enjoyed Ann Sharp's column in this issue. The column grew out of a discussion about how we seem to get a lot of submissions set in pre-technological situations, possibly featuring princes and princesses. Somehow, that's not sufficient. In a similar vein, just having your lead character win the lottery on the same day when her car has two flat tires, isn't enough to qualify the tale as a fantasy.

The missing element seems to be, well, *magic*. There needs to be something more than pretechnology or luck, some of what Marion calls the sense of wonder. Ann points out that you can't use magic to solve problems which are too trivial. And even though you can invent magic that's appropriate to your story, there is a fine tradition of using certain magical devices or conventions in certain ways, and if you mess with the tradition, readers will become annoyed. Brownies aren't going to play in a rock band; they're reclusive, and part of their lore is that if you thank them, they are offended. Wizards who use their powers to embarrass or pry on others, are too slimy for readers to care about. If griffons were common, they wouldn't be worth searching the far corners of the earth for, would they? An oracle whose pronouncements were too specific wouldn't be believable. And so on.

Heather's instructions about properly using "thee" and "thou" came out of the very submission whose misused verbiage begins her column. Marion has urged writers to study the King James Bible for proper usage, but here's a nice concise set of directions. File this one for reference, gang (and pull it out and read it before you plan to visit any Quakers).

The convention circuit continues; Marion plans to attend the annual Darkover convention near Baltimore, held over Thanksgiving weekend. Elisabeth and Raul will be at OryCon in Portland (November 1995), and Elisabeth will also be at LunaCon (April?). I'm not sure of my plans, but I expect Marion and I will attend at least one con together in the Northwest during early spring 1996, and then I'll be at WesterCon in El Paso. The whole staff will presumably attend the 1996 WorldCon in Los Angeles around Labor Day.

We have a lot of stories in the "paid for but not yet published" stack, so look forward to more from your favorites such as Jo Clayton and Richard Purtill (no, not a collaboration; separate stories), eluki bes shahar, Ardath Mayhar, John P. Buentello, Steven Piziks, and Dorothy Heydt. We've bought stories from Jackie Shank, Julia Mandala, Huan-Hua Chye, and a man who might even be a relative of mine, Howard F. Holman, though I swear if I were going to commit nepotism, it would be with someone I knew. (Yes, he spells his last name with an "A" where I use an "E", but there's a whole branch of my family that does spell it that way, my Minnesota cousins.) Kathleen Massie-Ferch has a story coming up. So do Elisabeth Waters and Raul Reyes; they happen to work here, but they are good writers as well, and if you knew how many times we'd insisted on rewrites before we bought each story, you'd be certain no favoritism was involved. Elisabeth's is a contemporary fantasy, while Raul's tale is based on Amerindian folklore.

— Rachel E. Holmen

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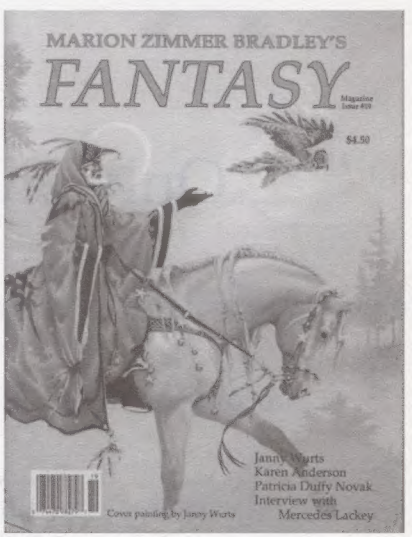

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The Cauldron — Issue #29

Story	Artist
❑ **Bloodsong** by Jo Clayton	❑ Nicholas Jainschigg
❑ **Caitlin's Magic** by Jackie Shank	❑ Lori Deitrick
❑ **Whom the Gods...** by Edwina Mayer	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean
❑ **Chastity** by Susan Jones	❑ Dameon Willich
❑ **Humphrey's Dilemma** by Cynthia McQuillin	❑ Alicia Austin
❑ **Toll Keeper** by Devon Monk	❑ James Balkovek
❑ **Witch Continuum** by Roberta Gellis	❑ Randy Hoar
❑ **The Cats of Time** by William A. Sell	❑ Allison Fiona Hershey
❑ **Dragon Path** by James Rada, Jr.	❑ Ray Williams
❑ **Wishes** by Beatrice Lanctot	❑ Stan Bruns
❑ **Neither/Nor** by Mary Catelli	❑ Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

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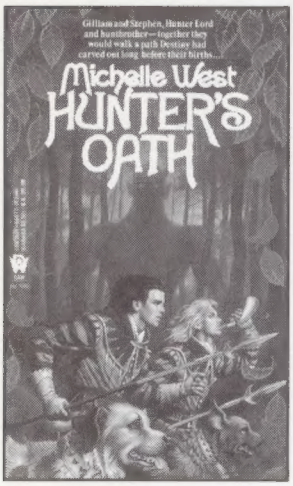

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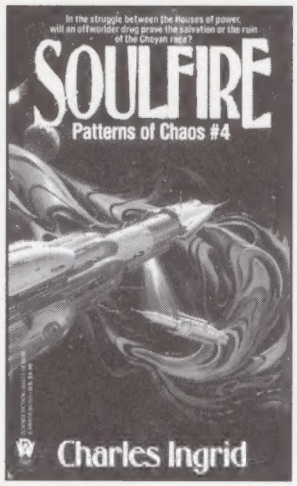

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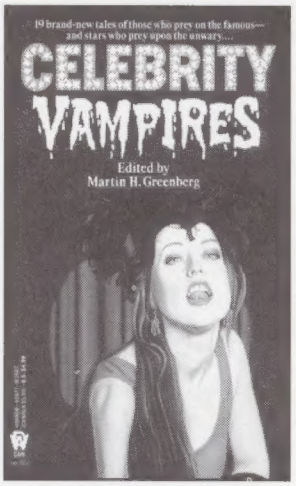

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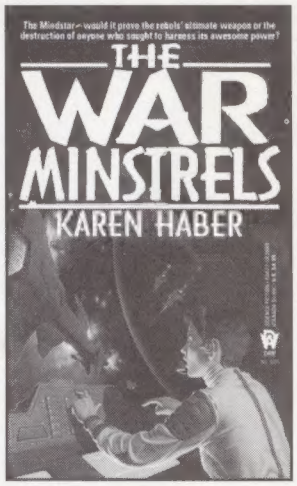

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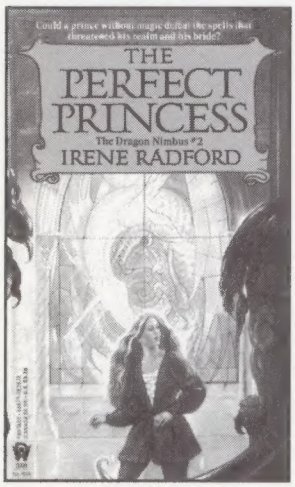

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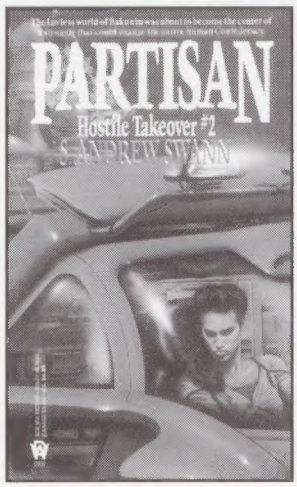

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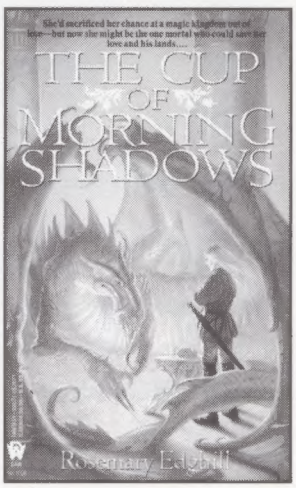

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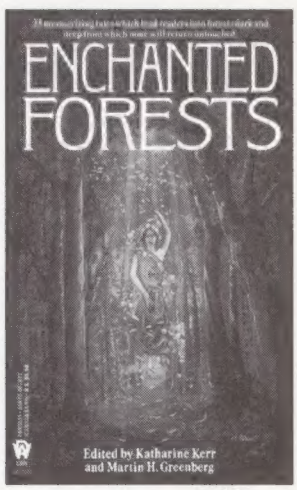

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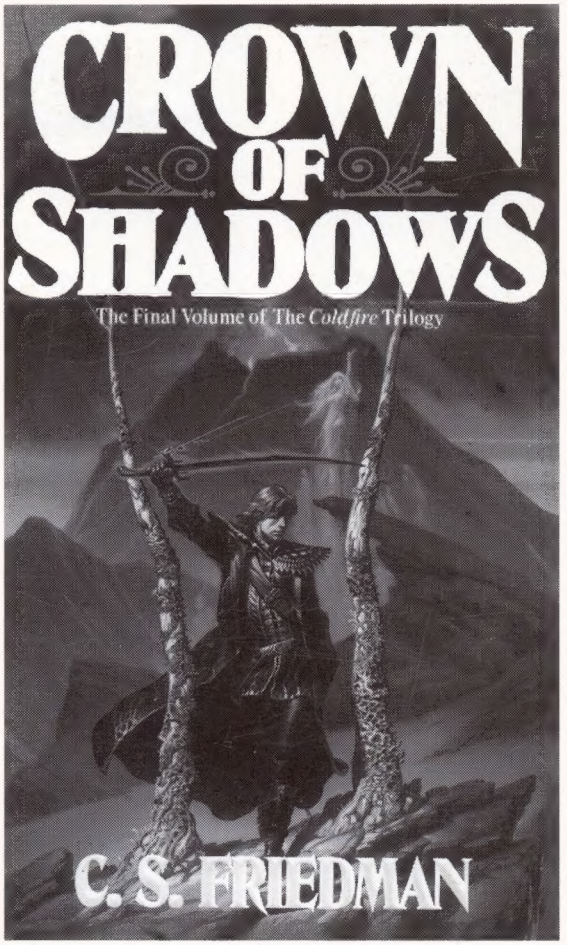

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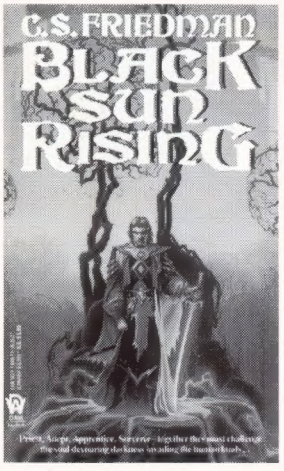

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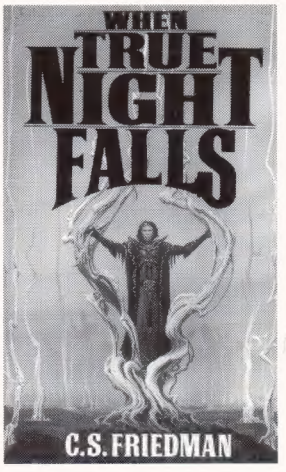

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